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THESIS

IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN IRAQI SHI'A GROUPS

by

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June 2012

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13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

The removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003 enabled Iraqi Shi'a groups, once banned from political participation, to once again have a voice. Iran, has also taken advantage of the post-Saddam political opportunities by attempting to influence religiously similar groups within Iraq, namely the Shi'a community. With approximately 60 percent of Iraqi population, the Iraqi Shi'a community has enormous voting power during any democratically elected process that could sway Iraq into Iranian hands. U.S. officials are apprehensive of the relationship between Iran and Iraqi Shi'a militant groups believing it could lead Iraq down a path towards a puppet state, subservient to Iranian regional ambitions. This thesis explores whether Iran is responsible for influencing every Shi'a militant groups within Iraq. Specifically, this thesis addresses the scope of Iranian influence within Iraqi Shi'a militant groups operating within Iraq today to determine the overall level of influence Iran has in Iraq.

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IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN SHI'A GROUPS OF IRAQ

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAH   Asa'ib al-Haq

COR   Council of Representatives

CPA   Coalition Provincial Authority

ICP   Iraqi Communist Party

IDIO   Iranian Defense Industries Organization

IED   Improvised Explosive Device

INA   Iraqi National Alliance

IRGC-QF   Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force

ISCI   Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq

ISF   Iraqi Security Forces

JAC   Justice and Accountability Commission

JAM   Jaysh al-Mahdi

KH   Keta'ib Hezbollah

NIA   National Iraqi Alliance

PDB   Promised Day Brigade

PUK   Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

SCIRI   Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution of Iraq

SOFA   Status of Forces Agreement

SP   Special Groups

UAV   Unmanned Aerial Vehicle

UIA   United Iraqi Alliance

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I. IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN SHI'A MILITANT GROUPS IN IRAQ

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Recently, Iran-U.S. relations have been troubled by Iran's nuclear ambitions, its aid to terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, and its expanding regional sphere of influence. Of all the controversial decisions Iran has made, U.S. policy makers consider Iran's attempt to influence its neighboring states as having the most destabilizing effect on security in the Middle East region. These recent developments have lead U.S. policy makers to discuss efforts that will effectively undermine Iran's future ambitions in the region, namely Iraq. To understand the threat posed by Iran in the Middle East region, U.S. officials must first identify and understand the current level of influence Iran has on Iraq. This thesis aims to analyze the scope of Iranian influence inside of Iraq by examining four dominant Shi'a militant groups: (1) the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia; (2) Keta'ib Hezbollah (KH); (3) Asa'ib Al-Haq (AAH); and (4) the Promised Day Brigade (PDB). By doing so, this analysis will provide the evidence needed to answer the question: What is the level of Iranian support given to the various Shi'a militant groups in Iraq?

B. IMPORTANCE

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran's establishment in 1979, its leaders have based important foreign policy decisions on its attempt to further the States' Islamic agenda. This is evident in its support for foreign radical groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas, as well as other revolutionary groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. By supporting such groups, Iran's intention has been to spread its revolutionary Islamic ideology by denouncing any regional government with pro-Western tendencies by directly challenging their legitimacy.[1] The end of the Iran-Iraq war, however, a war that waged on for almost a decade, signaled a shift in Iran's foreign policy objectives. Today,

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[1] Daniel L. Byman, Shahram Chubin, Jerrold Green and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Publishing, 2001), xii.

Iran is becoming more cautious of using its revolutionary Islamic rhetoric to shape its foreign policies. Instead, Iran has adopted a policy of attempting to increase its regional influence through any means possible.

Popular disenchantment grew with the Iranian people as a result of the prolonged Iran-Iraq war. The increased fear of instability in Iran forced the revolutionary regime to move away from its foreign policy dominated objectives by focusing instead domestically on a renewed focus on economic prosperity and unrest along Iran's borders.[2] Since that period, Iran has shifted its foreign policy from ideologically motivated goals and ambitions towards more realistic and influential ones. "Today, the Iranian leadership pursues a more aggressive, recalcitrant, and more anti-American foreign policy than at any other time since the early days of the revolution."[3] The 2010 National Security Strategy outlines the increasing danger of Iran by stating:

> In addition to its illicit nuclear program, [Iran] continues to support terrorism, undermine peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and deny its people their universal rights. Many years of refusing to engage Iran failed to reverse these trends; on the contrary, Iran's behavior has become more threatening.[4]

After the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003, Iran was accused of deploying hundreds of intelligence and paramilitary personnel into Iraq with multiple, and sometimes conflicting goals.[5] Iran's increasingly aggressive posture towards its Iraqi neighbors indicates its intentions to influence Iraq through various means in an attempt to fill the political void made after the ousting of President Saddam Hussein. One way Iran has attempted expand its influence in Iraq is through the sponsorship and support of Shi'a dominated militant groups. These groups can then be used to carry out Iran's orders by appealing to its shared Shi'a identity. Iranian support for Shi'a factions and armed militias has since become a major threat to the stability of Iraq. At the same time Iranian support for these

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[2] Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 9.

[3] Kenneth M. Pollack, "Iran's Covert War Against the United States," Brookings Institute, http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2011/1011_iran_pollack.aspx (accessed November 14, 2011).

[4] The National Military Strategy of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2010), 26.

[5] Daniel L. Byman, *The Changing Nature of State Sponsorship of Terrorism.* (Washington, D.C.: The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution, May 2008), 11.

groups has allowed them a better strategic position in Iraq once all U.S. forces depart.[6] Additionally, these pro-Iranian proxies could be called upon by Iran if the regime perceived itself as being threated on a number of its strategic interests in the region, most importantly being that of the country's infant nuclear weapons program. In the event of eminent threat, Iran could activate its proxies to destabilize the region and further thwarting the effectiveness of an attack. Iran's threating nature to security and stability in the Middle East region has engaged many U.S. officials in the development of a successful strategy intent on bringing Iran back into the international community by preventing its further isolation. The 2010 National Security Strategy adds that this can only be accomplished if Iran's leaders themselves are prepared to embrace this shift in its international outlook. Only Iran has the ability to restore the confidence of the international community and fulfill their obligations.[7]

Although it is not clear whether Iran will be able to assert its will over the Middle East region, there is little doubt that the outcome depends on how the U.S. responds to the Iranian challenge.[8] Though the Iranian challenge itself is vitally important, it is also important to the long-term success of the newly formed Iraqi government in the post-Saddam era. Since 2003, Iran has enjoyed, for the most part, uncontrolled regional dominance inside Iraq. Many U.S. officials believe that Iran's ability to influence Iraq is through its Shi'a population, by appealing to them through their shared religious identities. After the fall of Baghdad in 2003, the Shi'a population of Iraq, which had been historically banned from politics, instantly became stakeholders in the future fate of their country. At the same time, many Shi'a militant groups surfaced to take advantage of the security vacuum linked to the countries political turmoil created by the removal of Saddam. These factions, such as the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) led by Muqtada al-Sadr, have been responsible for large scale attacks against U.S. and Iraqi security forces. The JAM and other Shi'a groups have also engaged in territorial struggles with Sunni extremist

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[6] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iran-Iraq Relations,* by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report (Washington D.C.: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing 7-5700/RS22323, 2010), 1.

[7] The National Military Strategy of The United States 2010, 26.

[8] Vali Nasr, The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 270.

groups, such as al-Qaeda, for control over key areas inside Iraq. In 2007, al-Sadr's influence began to wane among his followers in the JAM after suffering heavy losses against U.S. and coalition forces. Muqtada chose, in the face of defeat, to disband the JAM and offer a cease-fire to coalition forces. This decision was not popular among some followers who eventually left to create offshoot organizations known by U.S. officials as Special Groups (SP).

The fractured Shi'a militant groups inside Iraq have found a unique opportunity to escalate violent activities against coalition forces while receiving funding, training, and weapons from Iranian groups such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps - Qods Force (IRGC-QF).[9] Though these offshoots do not share the same aspirations, they all consistently target U.S. forces operating in Iraq in hopes of prompting their eventual withdrawal. These groups have even attacked Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in order to undermine the current Maliki run government. Most of these groups share a strong sense of Iraqi nationalism, however, some believe the premature withdrawal of the U.S. and coalition forces has the potential of creating yet another power vacuum and inevitable civil war.[10] If this were to occur in Iraq, it could provide Iran with a unique opportunity of using these Shi'a militant groups to exert its influence into the Iraqi government. By doing so, Iran will have successfully created an Iranian puppet state, able to carry out its own policies. Recently, much of the fate of Iraq has been left in the hands of the inexperienced, Shi'a dominated, Iraqi government. The aim of this thesis is to provide U.S. policy makers a framework for understanding Iran's influence in Shi'a militant groups in Iraq. This greater understanding of Shi'a militant movements and their involvement with Iran will provide U.S. officials' better insight into the level and scope of Iranian influence in Iraq. In turn, this knowledge can help keep Iraq on an independent course set by its own people and not that of Iran.

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[9] Marisa Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate." The Institute for the Study of War and the Weekly Standard, August 2008, 4.

[10] Faleh Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*. (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 28.

C.   PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

It is still not clear how Iran will act in the absence of U.S. and coalition troop presence in Iraq. Many believe that Iran may see the drawdown as an opportune time to influence Iraq's Shi'a factions. By influencing Shi'a factions in Iraq, Iran potentially gains the ability to meddle in Iraqi politics to its own advantage and that of the Iraqi Shi'as friendly to Iran, even at the expense of the current Shi'a led government.[11] Others believe that there is little that can be done to curb the spread of Iranian's regional sphere of influence.[12] Although there are many differing opinions on the future of Iranian actions, the only consensus seems to be that it is very difficult to determine Iran's future endeavors in the region, most importantly in Iraq.

By supporting armed groups in Iraq, Iran has allowed itself a broader range of options which include: pressuring U.S. and British forces to leave Iraq; to bleed the U.S. militarily; and to be positioned to retaliate in Iraq should the U.S. take military action against Iran's nuclear program.[13] Iran has also positioned itself to use these proxy groups in response to any possible attack on its regional interests. One tool available today that could give U.S foreign policy makers an indication of Iran's influence in Iraq is the level of support given to Shi'a factions within Iraq. "If the U.S. has truly begun to assume a defensive posture in the Middle East, it will have to guard not only against Iranian missile strikes but also against Iran's sophisticated use of proxy militant groups."[14] Though Iran's support for Shi'a proxies inside Iraq have the potential of becoming very dangerous, this thesis will show that not all Shi'a factions within Iraq are equally influenced by Iran. By better understanding the nature of Iranian influence in Iraqi Shi'a militant groups, U.S. foreign policy makers will become better equipped to successfully counter Iranian interests in the Middle East.

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[11] Robert E. Hunter, *Building Security in the Persian Gulf* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Publishing, 2010), 37.

[12] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 270.

[13] Katzman, Iran-Iraq Relations, 2.

[14] Scott Stewart, "Iranian Proxies: An Intricate and Active Web," STRATFOR Global Intelligence, http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20100203_iranian_proxies_intricate_and_active_web?ip_auth_redirect=1 (accessed November 15, 2011).

D.   LITERATURE REVIEW

The removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003 enabled Iraqi Shi'a groups, once banned from political participation, to once again have a voice. Iran has also attempted to take advantage of the post-Saddam political opportunities by influencing religiously similar groups within Iraq, namely groups the Shi'a religion. With approximately 60 percent of Iraqi population, the Iraqi Shi'a community has enormous voting power that could change the fate of the country during any democratically elected process. U.S. officials have often become worried that if Iran becomes successful in influencing Shi'a political groups in Iraq they may see an Iraqi government subservient to Iran. Is Iran responsible for influencing every Shi'a faction within Iraq? This literature review identifies and discusses the different Shi'a militant groups operating within Iraq and the research that has previously been conducted on the subject. The aim of this literature review is to take the current research within this field and identify the gap to answer the question: What is the scope of Iranian influence within Iraqi Shi'a militant groups operating within Iraq?

What are the different Shi'a militant groups operating within Iraq? Who are they and what are their objectives? Over the recent years, this question has been thoroughly research and analyzed. Although there has been much information contributed to the topic of Shi'a militant groups within Iraq, there has been little knowledge dedicated to their involvement with Iran. There are three major areas of study that have been found in the extensive literature on the subject: (1) Historical research on Shi'a movements in Iraq; (2) the involvement of Shi'a militant groups inside Iraq; and to a lesser extent (3) Iran's support for these specific Shi'a militant groups. Of the research conducted on the level of Iranian support for Shi'a militant groups operating in Iraq, scholars have failed to collectively compare the various levels among the many Iraqi Shi'a militant groups. This literature review will identify each area of study to compare and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each scholars claim.

1.   History of the Shi'a Movement in Iraq

The literature on Shi'a movements in Iraq is abundant. From the material available, there are two main types of explanations that have been formulated with

regards to influence from Iran. One group of scholars, working exclusively with Shi'a movements within Iraq, believes there is substantial evidence to support a vast difference between Iraqi and Iranian Shi'ism. Yitzhak Nakash's book, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, explains that the Iraqi Shi'a community has distinguished themselves by their Arab tribal attributes and moral values rather than the close interaction between the bazaaris and the Ulama in Iran.[15] These differences highlight the split between Iranian and Iraqi Shi'a religious groups. Jerrold Green's book, *Understanding Iran*, has similar conclusions in that Gulf Shi'as generally regard Iran with spiritual and emotional affinity, rather than as a political model for emulation.[16] Vali Naser discusses the relationship between Shi'a of Iraq to Iran by explaining rather it is the Salafis who equate the similarities between the Shi'as of Iraq and Iran to conflate Sunnism with Arabism, posing as defenders of Arab identity and nationalism.[17] Together, these scholars collectively indicate that Shi'ism from Iraq is distinctly different from that of Iran.

Faleh Jabar's, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq,* looks at the Iran-Iraq Shi'a connection in a different light, by underlining the issue of citizenship rights dating back to the Ottoman and Safavid Iran empires. Both empires, the Sunni Ottoman and the Shi'a Safavid dynasties, extended protection over their co-religionists as well as their shrine cities in the other's empire.[18] Jabar continues by explaining Shi'ism was equated to Persianism and reinforced by both governments of Iraq and Iran. One example he uses is the Iraqi government's decision to deport thousands of Shi'as after the Iran-Iraq war, which has continued to be a source of grievance among Shi'as at large whose identity as Iraqis has been assaulted.[19] Jabar suggests that Iran does have some level of influence over Shi'a groups in Iraq. Though these scholars contribute to the understanding of Shi'ism in its social, cultural, political and economic dimensions, it is also important to note that he explains Iraqi Shi'as have never constituted a homogeneous group as political

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[15] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 7.

[16] Jerrold D. Green, et al., *Understanding Iran* (Santa Monica, CA.: Rand Publishing, 2009).

[17] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 270.

[18] Jabar, *The Shī'ite Movement in Iraq*, 69.

[19] Jabar, *The Shī'ite Movement in Iraq*, 69.

analysts have too often insist.[20] Ali Babakhan's, *The Deportation of Shi'is During the Iran-Iraq War*, indicates similar conclusions by explaining the mass deportations, brutal repression against Shi'a Islamic parties, and execution of their leaders, all resulted in a close cooperation of Iraqi exiles within an Iraqi Islamic political structure and became the core and future lever of power for Islamic Iran.[21] These scholars indicate that Shi'as of Iran and Iraq both share common ethnic and historical ties that unite them on some level. These groups within the Shi'a identity, however, often differ from one another and may be one reason for the political fragmentation seen in Iraqi politics today.

2.   **Existing Studies of Shi'a Groups in Iraq**

There has been extensive research done on Shi'a militant groups in Iraq. Authors such as Kenneth Katzman, Christopher Blanchard, Marisa Cochrane, and Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi have all provided a wealth of knowledge on the major Shi'a factions within Iraq throughout history and today. Of these factions, the majority have identified groups such as the Shi'a Islamist bloc (United Iraqi Alliance), the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Da'wa (Islamic Call) party, and even the factions of Muqtada al-Sadr.

Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi provides a unique historical foundation from the period of 1940s to the mid-1950s, in which he indicates as the formative phase during which the beginnings of the modern Islamic movements in Iraq started to take shape.[22] Of this period, one of the most influential Shi'a group, the Da'wa party, was established around the same time as the 1958 Iraqi revolution. The aim of the Da'wa party, formed by Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, was to restore Islam to the life of Muslims, government by the tolerant Sharia, and the establishment of the rule of God on Earth as a final goal.[23] Al-Ruhaimi provides an indicator of the level of Iranian influence by suggesting the Da'wa party has recently become a purely Iraqi party. Its membership and leading bodies have

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[20] Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*, 70.

[21] Ali Babakhan, "The Deportation of Shi'is During the Iran-Iraq War," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologies*, ed. Faleh Abdul Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 202.

[22] Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi, "The Da'wa Islamic Party: Origins, Actors and Ideology," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologies*, ed. Faleh Abdul Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 149.

[23] Al Ruhaimi, Adul-Halim, "The Da'wa Islamic Party: Origins, Actors and Ideology," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologies*, 159.

striven to demonstrate an "Iraqi national identity" to distinguish the limits of its political relationship with Iran.[24] Collectively, these scholars suggest early Shi'a political groups may have had connections with Iran historically, but is not as prominent today because of a rise in Iraqi nationalism.

Patrick Cockburn illustrates a more recent connection between Shi'a militant groups and their connection with Iranian influence in his book, *Muqtada*, by stating, "the Sadrist movement was historically anti-Iranian, but the U.S. accusations of Iranian complicity with Muqtada were to a degree of self-fulfilling."[25] He goes on to explain that although Muqtada initially tried to oppose any Iranian material support or influence, he was eventually unable to oppose it and accepted some measured financial support, modern weapons, and communication systems from them.[26] Christopher Blanchard's, *Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy*, indicated similar conclusions by stating, "The Sadr clan still has ideological ties to Iran by Sadr's great uncle, Mohammad Baqr al-Sadr, who was a political ally of Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.[27] These scholars reveal a level of measured support by Iran to the various Shi'a militant groups in Iraq. Despite these claims, however, there is little evidence supporting an undeniable subordinate relationship Shi'a militant groups in Iraq have to Iran.

After Saddam's fall, Sadr's militia, the "Mahdi Army" (Jaysh al-Mahdi, or JAM) estimated at 60,000 strong, fought against the perceived U.S. occupation of Iraq. Iran saw the militia as a useful tool against the U.S. in the event of a U.S.-Iran confrontation.[28] In 2007, al-Sadr declared a six-month cease-fire during the Shabaniyah festival and pilgrimage. During this time, al-Sadr's loyalty was tested as the JAM splintered into different cells, known as "special groups" (SP). These groups today have used this

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[24] Adul-Halim, "The Da'wa Islamic Party: Origins, Actors and Ideology," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologies*, 160.

[25] Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle For Iraq*, 1st Scribner hardcover ed. (New York: Scribner, 2008), 167.

[26] Cockburn, Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle For Iraq, 169.

[27] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iraq: Regional Perspectives and U.S. Policy,* by Christopher Blanchard et al, CRS Report (Washington D.C.: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing 7-5700/RS33793, January 12, 2007), 9.

[28] Katzman, Iran-Iraq Relations, 2.

window provided by the split from al-Sadr's factions to escalate their violent activities.[29] No longer under the leadership of al-Sadr, these groups have acted independently to increase the level of instability within Iraq. Some of these groups also tend to overlap in similar command structures and objectives.

3. Level of Iranian Support for Iraqi Shi'a Militant Groups (Special Groups)

There have been many articles and books published about on the Shi'a political factions inside Iraq, such as the Da'wa and ISCI political parties, and even its militant wings such as the Jaysh al-Mahdi, or JAM. These publications, however, lack evidence between the relationship of Iran and its support for Shi'a militant groups in Iraq, specifically the offshoots of the Jaysh al-Mahdi groups known as Keta'ib Hezbollah, Asa'ib Al-Haq, and the Promised Day Brigade. Marisa Cochrane's article, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate" regards these offshoots as, "Shi'a militia cells that receive funding, training, and weapons from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), the Iranian Special Forces that export the Islamic revolution to other countries."[30] This definition suggests that all Shi'a militant groups operating outside the control of Muqtada al-Sadr are under some level of influence by Iran. Similar views were also echoed in a press conference conducted in July 2007, by U.S. Army Brigadier General Kevin J Bergner, the spokesman for Multi-National Forces in Iraq. General Bergner commented on the involvement of Shi'a special groups operating inside Iraq against coalition forces by stating, "These special groups are militia extremists, funded, trained and armed by external sources… specifically by Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force operatives."[31] Many scholars and analysts believe that the majority of Shi'a militant groups inside Iraq receive some level of influence and support from Iran.

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[29] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 3.

[30] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 3.

[31] "MNF-I Spokesman Details Secret Cell Involvement in Iraq," Operation New Dawn, http://www.usf-iraq.com/?option=com_content&task=view&id=12653&Itemid=128 (accessed November 15, 2011).

4.   **Conclusion: What we Know and What we Don't Know**

There is not one single explanation of the level or scope of Iranian influence in Shi'a militant groups in Iraq. Arguably, however, the main contribution of knowledge on the subject tends to look at the Shi'a population with regards to its ties to Iran, the role of Shi'a militant groups in Iran, and in small number of sources, the support given to some of these groups by Iran. This basis of knowledge provides little information collectively on the level of Iranian influences to Shi'a groups in Iraq or a better understanding of how this relationship contributes to the overall strategic ambitions of Iran.

Scholars and analysis tend to organize all Shi'a militant groups into one category as receiving some level of support from Iran. This thesis will fill the knowledge gap by analyzing the level of Iranian influence in each Shi'a militant groups in Iraq. By doing so, this thesis will determine that not all Iraqi Shi'a Militant groups are supported by Iran. Furthermore, of the groups that are supported by Iran, there are varying levels of support and objectives.

E.   THESIS OVERVIEW

This thesis will use a combination of methods to analyze the question of the Iranian level of support given Shi'a militant groups in Iraq. First, through a historical analysis, this thesis will identify the founding Shi'a groups in Iraq by focusing on the Da'wa and ISCI party formation and its ties with Iran. Next, this thesis will continue a historical analysis of identifying activities under the Sunni dominated Ba'ath regime and rule of Saddam Hussein to determine what, if any, support they receive from Iran. Additionally, this thesis will look at the different Shi'a militant groups after the U.S. invasion to understand how it may have changed the dynamics of Iranian influence in Iraq. Finally, in the conclusion, this paper will compare the different levels of influence in each Shi'a militant group in order to understand the overall scope of Iran's future power in Iraq.

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II. THE SHI'A RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN IRAQ: HISTORY AND IDENTITY

Vali Naser writes, "The Middle East will not be defined by its Arab identity or by any particular form of national government. Ultimately, the character of the region will be decided in the crucible of the Shi'a revival and the Sunni response to it."[32] The most important aspect that may determine the outcome of the Shi'a revival is how Iran is able to spread its revolutionary ideologies through the region, specifically in Iraq. Do the Shi'as of Iraq differ from that of the Shi'as of Iran? Who are the Shi'as of Iraq and how did they become dominant political players during the post-Saddam era? This chapter will explore the Shi'as of Iraq; who they are, and how they have risen to power within the political structure of Iraq. This chapter will also discuss the establishment of various violent Shi'a militia groups and how they have split from the more traditional Shi'a Islamic organizations.

A. WHO ARE THE SHI'A OF IRAQ?

When the modern state of Iraq was formed in 1921, the Shi'a did not constitute a close-knit group but were divided into numerous, distinct, self-involved communities.[33] Historically, Iraq has always maintained an important geostrategic position for the Shi'a religion as a whole. Some of the major Shi'a shrine cities located in Iraq have been of considered a cultural-religious contact zone between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shi'a Safavid, and later Qajar Empires of Iran.[34] During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, the Ottoman and Safavid Empires battled over the area today known as Iraq. Though the Ottoman Empire eventually won control over the region of modern Iraq, it remained heavily influenced by Iran by its many cultural and linguistic commonalities. The two periods of Iranian rule from 1508–1533, and 1622–1638, reinforced the claim

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[32] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 22.

[33] Jabar, *The Shīʿite Movement in Iraq*, 63.

[34] Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, 14.

that the Safavids, and its successor the Qajars, were to be the sole protectors of Shi'a interests in Iraq.[35] Despite Iranian influence within Iraq during these periods, a large population of Shi'a inside Iraq did not exist.

It was not until the eighteenth century that Persian Ulama and religious students arrived in Iraq in large numbers. This large-scale migration effort was responsible for ushering in a new period of Shi'a influence.[36] During this period, the Shi'a community became a stronger cultural force that was able to take advantage of the instability found inside Iraq at the time. In places such as Karbala and Najaf, the Persian religious families managed to overshadow the Arab Ulama and succeeded in dominating religious circles.[37] In fact, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the power of the Persian Ulama was so significant, that it became a liaison to both the Ottoman and Qajar governments.

Another source of contention between the Iran and Iraq is the issue of Persian citizenry. The Persians that resided in Iraq were allowed to keep their Iranian citizenry and were responsible to only the Iranian consular officers who held extra-territorial jurisdiction.[38] Though this created conflict between the two empires, as allowed Iran to continue their influence with the Shi'a of Iraq. "The boundary between Shi'ism and Sunnism thus came to coincide with the boundary between empires, with what is today southern Iraq extending as a kind of Shi'a salient into Sunnism flank."[39] Although the Shi'a population in Iraq during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was significant, it was not as pronounced as it became during the nineteenth century. During this period, there was a massive conversion of the bulk of Iraq's nominally Sunni Arab tribes to Shi'ism due to the Ottoman policy of tribal settlement. In 1831, the Ottoman resumed control over Iraq and encouraged tribesmen to settle down and take up agricultural work to boost the Empires tax revenue.[40] This transition from tribal to sedentary life in Iraq allowed various Shi'a religious leaders better access to greater numbers of people. Cities

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[35] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 14.

[36] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 15.

[37] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 17.

[38] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 17.

[39] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 66.

[40] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 32.

such as Najaf and Karbala became important centers for conversion to Shi'ism. Migration into urban centers enabled religious leaders to influence larger amounts of the population making Shi'a conversion more prevalent within Iraq.

The radical change from tribal to urban living also created an identity crisis among many of the newly settled tribesman. The conversion to Shi'ism, for many of these people, came as a reaction to coping with the breaking down of their former tribal socioeconomic and political organizations.[41] These people saw similarities among its tribal customs and societal values taught among the Shi'a religion. Despite the conversion from Sunnism to Shi'ism among many Iraqi tribesmen, many continued to practice traditional tribal customs. This blend of tribal and religious customs created many different forms of the Shi'a religion within Iraq and caused fragmenting within the religion itself. Iraqi Shi'as have to a great extent been distinguished by their Arab tribal attributes and moral values.[42] The cultural aspects of tribes and its appearance in Iraqi Shi'a groups' underline just one difference from that found in Iran. Although Sunni tribesmen converted to a similar form of Shi'a religion found in Iran, they still maintained many of their Arab and tribal values. These values have over time, contributed to the many differences between the Shi'a people of Iraq and Iran.

During the early twentieth century, the Shi'a population in Iraq had become increasingly more interested in politics due to the centralization of Shi'a leadership and the impact of modernist Islamic thinkers.[43] It is important to note that the modernization process created among modern the Shi'a of Iraq has been very different than that of Iran. Iran established its Shi'a population during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, which has since become the State's official religion. In Iraq, however, the modern Shi'a population only flourished after the mid-eighteenth century and onwards. Additionally, the Shi'a of Iraq have been widely marginalized by their lack of participation in modern state politics. Members of the Sunni religion have historically dominated governmental positions in modern Iraq until recently.

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[41] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 45.

[42] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 23.

[43] Nakash, *The Shi'îs of Iraq*, 49.

B.   THE SHI'A OF IRAQ AND IRAN

As Ruhollah Khomeini came to power in 1979 after the removal of the Shah, Iran moved from its secular trajectory to a Shi'a dominated theocracy. Khomeini thought that a similar theocracy, which was successful in Iran, could be instituted in other Shi'a states in the region such as Iraq. Although Khomeini tried to fill this role by insisting on the establishment of a theocracy in every Islamic state in the region, it never was successfully extended beyond Iran's borders. A number of Shi'a accepted Khomeini as their political leader however, chose to look for their religious guidance from other Grand Ayatollahs, such as Abu al-Qasem al-Khoi of Najaf, and others.[44] The separation between political and religious authorities in Iraq is important because, if given the opportunity, Shi'a followers will chose to follow Ayatollahs from their home country rather than by an outsider of Iran. Many people thought the Islamic revolution of 1979, which occurred in Iran would allow Khomeini to become known as the default supreme Ayatollah for all of the Shi'a religion. Yet many Iraqi's of the Shi'a faith chose not to follow him. Of the five incomparable Ayatollahs, only Grand Ayatollah al-Khoei was able to gain the most reverence among the Shi'a community in Iraq.[45] Khoi and Khomeini did not share similar religious views as it pertained its involvement in political governance. Khoi publicly rejected Khomeini's theory of velayet-e faqih, or rule of the jurisprudent, believing it to be a bogus innovation and urged his followers to ignore Khomeini.[46] Since Khomeini's death, the Islamic Republic of Iran has failed to produce another ayatollah as important both religiously and politically. The lack of such a powerful Ayatollah within the Shi'a faith to forced many leaders to revert back to quietest ayatollahs, such as found in the seminaries of Qom and Najaf, who chose not to impede in the government or political arena.[47]

It is important to understand whom the members of the Shi'a religion in Iraq chose to follow as their primary religious mentors. At times, Ayatollahs in the Shi'a faith

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[44] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 72.

[45] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 144.

[46] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 145.

[47] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 72.

have been known to wield powerful influence over their followers. In many instances, Shi'a scholars historically have been known to exert their influence over their followers in a higher capacity than that of the political government. On example throughout Iran's history of the Ayatollah influence over politics is known as the tobacco protest of 1890, where a Shi'a led revolt was organized by the Ulama against the tobacco concession granted by the Shah to Great Britain. Grand Ayatollah Mirza Hassan Shirazi, believing the concession would create severe economic hardships for the people of Iran, issued a fatwa for the Shi'a community against the use of tobacco products. The boycott that ensued as a result of the fatwa was so powerful that the government ultimately had to reverse the policy by denouncing favorable economic support for Great Britain.

Since the time of the Safavid kings of Iran, the Shi'a faith has been closely enmeshed with Iranian identity, as the two have influenced each other.[48] "While the existence of Persian or Iranian influence at the roots of Shi'ism remains much debated, there is no doubt that the development of the faith since the sixteenth century has had a large Iranian component to it, and that a far greater proportion of Iranians identify with Shi'ism than do Arabs, who have mostly remained Sunni."[49] Since that time however, the Shi'a of Iraq have successfully blended their Arab and religious identities to form a separate ideology, different from both the Sunni majority in the Arab world, and that of the Shi'a dominated Iran. Despite these differences, many Arab regimes have used the religious similarities between the Shi'a of Iran and Iraq to their advantage by the suggestion of a hidden "Shi'a agenda" cultivated in Iran and spread throughout Iraq. This speaks of the Sunni anxiety towards the recent power gains by the Shi'a of Iraq that has allowed them to become known as first Arab-world country to adopt a political system that gives its Shi'a majority entry into its government.

C.   IRAQI SHI'A SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Shi'a militant Islam in Iraq can be seen as far back the 1950s, with the formation of the Da'wa party. During the 1960–70s, mass Islamic protests and the executions of

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[48] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 79.

[49] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 79.

many Shi'a Islamic leaders by the Ba'athist regime increased the intensity at which these Shi'a movements carried out their violent Islamic agendas. During this time, Islamic activism revealed the extent to which Shi'a Islamism was in action and capable of defying a formidable regime, even long before the rise of Khomeini in Iran.[50] Since then, the Shi'a Islamic movement has evolved and fractured into many distinctive groups, all with different objectives and grievances. Regardless of its leadership, Shi'a Islamism has become a major aspect of political and social development inside today's Iraq.

It was modernization, which brought people from small villages to larger cities that aided in the establishment of a political dimension to the Shi'a faith in the Middle East region as a whole. Lebanon during the 1970s brought together fragmented Shi'a communities under a political movement known as Harakat al-Mahrumin (Movement of the Deprived) led by Imam Musa al-Sadr. Later, that political organization created a militia wing known as Amal (Hope). Though Musa al-Sadr was responsible for the genesis of Shi'a political organization in Lebanon, the leader was later pushed aside for Hezbollah (The Party of God) led by Hassan Nasrallah. Similarly in Iraq during the 1950s, land reform moved Shi'a peasants from agrarian life and forced them into cities such as Baghdad and Basra freeing them from political control.[51] Poor conditions found among the Shi'a population of Iraq created the need for social services that were remedied by Shi'a leaders at the time. Clerical leaders such as the Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (executed by Saddam Hussein in 1999, and the father of Muqtada al-Sadr), Abol-Qasem al-Khoi, and Ali al-Sistani became important leaders in the Shi'a community of Iraq because of these reasons.[52] These important leaders would later be know as founding the Shi'a Islamic Movement witnessed in Iraq. Other Shi'a figures later, such as Muqtada al-Sadr, would emulate similar techniques in order to leverage to the poorer sections of Shi'a community in Baghdad.

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[50] Jabar, *The Shī'îte Movement in Iraq*, 15.

[51] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 85.

[52] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 85.

D.   IRAQI SHI'A NATIONALISM

The Shi's of Iraq have a strong foundation for national identification. For the Shi'a, secular nationalism was an inclusive identity that was defined above and beyond the polemical debates of old and as equals to Sunnis in the eyes of the nation.[53] Iraqi nationalism, as practiced by the Shi'a community of Iraq, is vastly different to that experienced in Iran. Iran historically did not have a similar ideological attachment to nationalism because the Shi'a faith always constituted its religious majority. Therefore, the Iranian people have never had to fear a government that would express other religious views other than their own. Throughout history the Shi'a sense of Iraqi nationalism has varied in intensity. In 1920, the Shi'as of Iraq joined Sunni tribes to rise up against their British occupiers. The rebellion was quickly put down, and the Shi'a, rather than the Sunnis, were punished for their provocation.

Later, the Sunni compensated for their minority status in Iraq by merging their countries identity with that of the larger Sunni Arab world, a world that saw the Shi'as as disloyal because of their perceived Iranian influence, which forced many of its leaders to flee to Iran.[54] Though this was never really the case, Sunni dominated Iraqi regimes throughout history have used this same rhetoric to marginalize the Shi'a population ensuring they never received entrance into Iraqi politics. The 1920 revolt continues to sit heavy on the minds of current Shi'a Ayatollahs of Iraq. Shi'a leader Ayatollah Sistani, after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, warned his followers that if they did not act in moderation, the U.S. and British would once again lock the Shi'as out of power by rather giving it to the Sunnis.[55] Moderation was professed by much of the Shi'a religious figures in Iraq who chose to work with U.S. forces for inclusion into political participation. There were other Shi'a groups however, that did not agree on this mutual

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[53] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 87.

[54] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 91.

[55] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 91.

relationship based on the historically events between the Shi'a of Iraq and the west. Many of these groups choose violence over cooperation with U.S. and coalition forces after 2003.

During the 1960s, when Arab nationalism was at its height, ethnic identity became an important measure of political loyalty. If the members of the Shi'a faith were considered a threat to Arab nationalism, they would easily be cast as Iranian lackeys and enemies to the Arab cause.[56] After the Iranian revolution of 1979, however, many Shi'a abandoned the notion of secular nationalism to join Islamic Shi'a political movements. Riding the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran and its ideological messages, many Islamic political organizations were formed. Many of these Shi'a organizations, such as the al-Da'wa or Da'wa party (the Islamic Call) of Iraq, received financial and political support from Tehran in an effort to push its Shi'a agendas.[57] However, the lines of Iranian influences in these political movements vary with time and place.

E.   IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Despite their time spent in Iran, the Shi'a of Iraq did not advocate the idea of self-rule or an Iran-Iraq merger, but instead stressed their Arab and Shi'a origins together in an attempt to accommodate a dual identity within the framework of the Iraqi state.[58] Despite these attempts, the Iran-Iraq war brought fear of this dual identity into the minds of the Sunni dominated Iraqi government. As a result, the Iraqi Shi'a community became compelled to pledge its alliance to Iraq or that of its similarly religious oriented Iran. Ultimately this decision resulted in a negative effect on the Islamic Shi'a groups of Iraq. SAIRI, Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, which was a popular Shi'a political organization founded in Iran, was forced to prioritize its religious identity over its national allegiance. This prevented SAIRI from integrating with other religious groups in Iraq allowing them to strengthen its Iraqi membership. The Iraq-Iran war also strengthened the notion of Iraqi patriotism and was then used to form a strong protective

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[56] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 108.

[57] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 140.

[58] Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, 138.

shield around the Ba'athist regime, thereby alienating Islamist groups from mainstream popular sentiment.[59] The majority of Iraqi Shi'as chose Iraqi nationalism over its religious affinities with Iran further separating the two.

This surge of Iraqi nationalism helped explain how and why Iraq could sustain an eight-year war with an army composed of 80 percent of the Shi'a faith, against a Shi'a nation led by an Ayatollah of noble descent from the Shi'a Imams.[60] This can be seen as a primary point of separation for Iran and Iraq. The revolution in Iran was a blend of religious identity and nationalism. This attempted movement in Iraq however, did not fall on the same lines. After the war ended in 1988, the Iraqi Shi'a Islamic movement entered a phase of reconstruction and reorganization which further divided the Shi'a Islamic movement from Iran and Iraq.

F.   THE 1991 SHI'A UPRISING IN IRAQ

Saddam Hussein's decision to commit forces to the invasion of Kuwait in February of 1991 had unforeseeable consequences among the Iraqi Shi'a community. Understandably, U.S. and coalition forces were sent to stop the unprovoked invasion of Kuwait by resulting in the quick decimation of Iraqi forces. As the Iraqi army was perceived as in a moment of weakness, a radio transmission from a CIA-run radio station, called the Voice of Free Iraq, broadcast a call for the people to rise up against Saddam Hussein and his regime.[61] This message indicated that U.S. forces in Kuwait successfully weakened Saddam's forces that created a particularly opportune time for the people of Iraq to rise up and overthrow the regime. On 6 March 1991, Richard Dowden of *The Independent*, gave this remarkable account of the situation:

> The revolution, bursting out after years of oppressive Baath rule, appears confused and chaotic, united only by the hatred for Saddam Hussein of the Shi'a Muslims in southern Iraq. It is the nationalist revolution aimed at ridding the country of the Baath regime, according to its leaders, but it also has strong overtones of an Iranian-style Islamic fundamentalism. Abu Iman, the rebel commander of this town, said the regime would be

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[59] Jabar, *The Shīʿīte Movement in Iraq*, 254.

[60] Jabar, *The Shīʿīte Movement in Iraq*, 254.

[61] Robert Fisk, *The Great War For Civilisation: the Conquest of the Middle East* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 646.

replaced by a government of the people, which would not model itself on western democracy or the Iranian revolution, but follow its own path. It would be neither Sunni nor Shia but for all Iraqis.[62]

Thousands of protesters, mostly unarmed, took to the streets to occupy government buildings and free prisoners. At the height of the uprising, rebel forces surprisingly controlled fourteen of the country's eighteen provinces and were even close to capturing the Baathist capital of Baghdad. Saddam's forces eventually reinstated order within Iraq by using an imbalanced level of force against the Shi'a dominated resistance. Many rebels and their families were shot in their homes, gunned down by helicopters, or executed in groups and buried in mass graves. Although actual death numbers cannot be determined, during Saddam's trial, the court had documentary statements from witnesses, showing that at least 100,000, and possibly as many as 180,000 Iraqi Shi'a died as result of the 1991 repression.[63] Those that were able to escape the brutality of the Baathist regime during its repression were forced to flee to neighboring countries such as Iran. There is a strong sense among many of the Shi'a involved in the uprising that indicate that it was not its own capacity that lead to the failure of the revolt, but rather the U.S.' decision not to pursue Iraqi forces from Kuwait inside the borders of Iraq.

The uprising was able to gain momentum only after President H.W. Bush's speech urging Iraqi Shi'as to rebel against the government. Later in 2003, U.S. ambassador James F. Jeffrey offered the Iraqi Shi'a leadership an apology for the U.S. inaction during the 1991 uprising. This perception of betrayal by the U.S. still resonates among many of the Shi'a communities inside Iraq today. Even the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was responsible for toppling Saddam and his regime and allowing Shi'as to dominate Iraqi politics, was not enough to undo the consequences of the U.S.' inaction in 1991. This can also be one reason for the consistent and consensual anti-U.S. outlook among the various Shi'a militant groups operating in Iraq after 2003. However, what is also important to glean from the 1991 Iraqi Shi'a uprising is that it was also an ideologically nationalistic movement that did not follow an Islamic path set by Iran in

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[62] Fisk, *The Great War For Civilisation: the Conquest of the Middle East*, 647.

[63] John F. Burns, "Uncovering Iraq's Horrors in Desert Graves," NY Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/05/world/middleeast/05grave.html?_r=1 (accessed March 22, 2012).

1979. The Shi'a of Iraq in 1991, similarly to the Shi'a militant groups in the wake the invasion of 2003, did not desire a movement based on the Iranian sense of Shi'ism, but rather their own nationalistic one that could appeal to all those who opposed Saddam Hussein and his regime.

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III.   SHI'A POLITICAL GROUPS OF IRAQ

A.   THE DA'WA PARTY

During the 1940s and 1950s the younger generation of Iraq Shi'as were becoming frustrated from their exclusion into politics. This led many Shi'a to attempt to look for other entrances into sociopolitical life by following groups such as the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). The appeal to communism, which was a popular movement during the period, was closely related to the failure of Iraqi nationalism. Many Iraqis saw communism as an ideological movement capable of acting as a unifying framework for the country.[64] The revolution that took place in 1958 however, proved to many Shi'a the failure of the communist ideology. Much of the Iraqi Shi'a community became disillusioned after the political outcome realizing that communism was no longer capable of bringing about the political order and change that they expected. As a result, the Shi'a of Iraq began to look for other sources for inspiration in their communities that could appeal to them collectively. It was Islam that was able to fill the ideological and sociopolitical vacuum created by the decline of communism in Iraq.[65] The Shi'a religious establishment, led by Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, established a Shi'a entity capable of confronting the secularist ICP followers known as al-Da'wa.[66] The Da'wa party still exists today and is one of the oldest known Shi'a Islamist parties in Iraq. By joining the Da'wa party, Shi'as demonstrated a clear preference for a leadership in the organization composed of Iraqis of Arab origin, namely Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr.[67] The Shi'a of Iraq initially chose the secular path of communism, however, resorted instead to their religious affinities they were most comfortable with when it failed.

The information provided on the formation of the Da'wa party is not very clear. Records kept by the party never reveal the exact date of inception or who were the

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[64] Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 138.

[65] Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 138.

[66] Liam Anderson et al., *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?* (New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 123.

[67] Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 137.

founding members. Some scholars suggest the party was formed by eight clerics and lay figures at the house of the leading Shi'a authority, Sayyid Muhsim al-Kakim, in Najaf, Iraq on 12 October 1957.[68] The aim of the Da'wa party was to restore Islam to the life of Muslims, government by the tolerant Sharia, and establishment of the rule of God on Earth as a final goal through four distinct phases.[69] This four-stage plan was very similar to that of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. The Da'wa party formed its first sources of indoctrination from the Egyptian thinkers like Hassan El-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Muhammad al-Ghazali.[70] The first phase, known as the transformative phase or al-marhalla al-taghyiriya, was a period that started in 1957, lasted until 1979, and was intended to change society intellectually. This phase was not only to promote religious gatherings, but also to pressure the government into granting the Iraqi Shi'a people greater freedom and rights.[71] Though the Da'wa party attempted to influence aspects of the Iraqi government, it believed there was a clear distinction between the government and the party leaders' function as religious authorities. Ethics and morals should begin with Islam, but ultimately be subordinate in its relationship to a secular government.

While mostly staying underground, the Da'wa party built its party's awareness by leading student processions and publishing Islamic newsletters and magazines. Furthermore, the party sought to expand its membership by appealing to both educated lay people, and eventually the Shi'a working class that had originally been attracted to the ICP but no longer saw it as a viable option.[72] The coup of July 17, 1968 however, changed the environment the Da'wa party operated in. Due to the repressive nature of the new regime, the party could no longer actively pursuit its transformation. Much of the party's leadership was arrested or executed during the early 1970s by the Baathist regime in power. Da'wa was forced into hiding and was able to remain active but very weak.

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[68] Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, 151.

[69] Nakash, *The Shiʿis of Iraq*, 153.

[70] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 81.

[71] "Party History," The Official Website of the Islamic Da'wa Party, http://www.islamicdawaparty.com/?module=home&fname=history.php&active=7&show=1 (accessed December 4, 2011).

[72] Rodger Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development in Iraq: The Case of the Islamic Da'wa Party," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (2004): 945.

The political phase, al-marhala al-siyasiya, was aimed at arming itself and carrying out military operations against the Iraqi government. After it had built its public base and won enough mass strength, its goal was to shift to the political level to wage struggle for power.[73] The Da'wa party was given additional motivation against the anti-Islamic Iraqi regime in 1979, by the events unfolding in Iran. Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr used the momentum created by the Islamic revolution in Iran to expand the Da'wa party into different parts of Iraq. By late 1979, the Da'wa party had formed a military wing later called Shahid as-Sadr, who carried out assassination attempts on Saddam Hussein's top aid, Tariq Aziz. Sadr's choice to promote violent confrontation with the Baathist regime inevitably sealed his own fate.[74] As a result of the resistance, the regime made membership of the Da'wa party punishable by death and Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and his sister were executed shortly thereafter on April 8, 1980.

The government continued to mercilessly punish all associated with Islamic parties, forcing the bulk of the party's members to flee from Iraq to Iran.[75] As a result, their Iranian hosts heavily influenced many of the leaders of the Da'wa party. The party became identified with Iran, which in turn, cost them their popularity among the Iraqi Shi'a community. This not only had implications among its supporters, but also within the party itself. The controversy among the Da'wa leadership eventually resulted in the split of the party into several different Iraqi Shi'a factions. Even though much of the Da'wa leadership fled to Iran, there was still a significant support structure within Iraq that was able to continue military operations against the Ba'athist regime. This militant wing of Da'wa in hiding within Iraq was even responsible for assassination attempts on Saddam Hussein himself in 1982 and 1987, as well his son, Uday, in 1996.[76]

The most notable faction formed from the Da'wa was known as SAIRI, or the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Formed in November 1982 in

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[73] Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, 81.

[74] Anderson et al., *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?*, 126.

[75] Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi, "The Da'wa Islamic Party," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq*, ed. Faleh Abdul-Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 156.

[76] Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development in Iraq: The Case of the Islamic Da'wa Party," 946.

Tehran, by Sayyid Baqir al-Hakim, SCIRI became known exclusively as an "Iranian Creation." SAIRI was considered, not only an Iraqi tool in the hands of Iran against the Iraqi regime, but also as a way to contain the Da'wa party and its decision-making.[77] SAIRI's establishment can be seen as an important historical aspect of Iranian influence because its military and intelligence wings were both managed by actual Iranians.

After the Iraq-Iran war ended in August 1988, SCIRI was able to leave Iran to rebuild and gain support within Iraq. By moving out of Iran, the party was able to disconnect itself from its perceived Iranian influence. By establishing itself in Iran and then moving to Iraq, SCIRI was able to widen its support base and experience both sides of the Iran-Iraq conflict. Such experiences allowed the party to eventually shape its identity by adopting significant political, ideological, and organizational changes allowing the party it to better cope with the new realities in Iraq, the region, and across the globe.[78] Though SCIRI was popular opposition against the Iraqi regime, it was not the only Shi'a group to do so. The Da'wa party also engaged in efforts against the Iraqi government from inside the country on several different occasions.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq and the subsequent removal of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'athist party presented the Da'wa party with an opportunity to reemerge from its underground Islamic activism. Today, this new Da'wa party has portrayed itself as a genuinely independent Iraqi nationalist movement, particularly since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini removed a competing source of allegiance for many of its party members.[79] However, the future of Da'wa in the post-Saddam era of Iraqi politics has been plagued by competition from other Shi'a Islamic groups such as SCIRI as well as the Sadrists movement. After Saddam's death, the Da'wa party was able to gain the strongest support among Iraqis. One prominent Da'wa member today, Nuri al-Maliki, serves as the Prime Minister of Iraq.

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[77] Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi, "The Da'wa Islamic Party," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq*, ed. Faleh Abdul-Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 157.

[78] Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi, "The Da'wa Islamic Party," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq*, ed. Faleh Abdul-Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 157.

[79] Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development in Iraq: The Case of the Islamic Da'wa Party," 950.

B. SUPREME COUNCIL FOR ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAQ (SCIRI)

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), formerly known as the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), is the Shi'a political group with the strongest ties to Iran. Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim first established SCIRI in Tehran in 1982 with the goal of creating a foundation for all future Islamist activism within Iraq. The organization emerged as a result of efforts by the Iranian government to unite the fragmented Iraqi Shi'a groups under a wider ideological umbrella that could be used in opposition to the Ba'athist regime. During the period of 1980–82, Iran had many unsuccessful attempts to unify the different Iraqi groups. In 1979, the first attempt by Iran to organize the Iraqi Ulama in the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, presided over by Murtadha al-Askari, was shortly thereafter disbanded. It was unsuccessful because its leader, al-Askari was of Iranian origin and a founding member of the Da'wa party.[80] Another attempt was made by Iran was the creation of The Revolutionary Army for the liberation of Iraq (al-Jaish al-Islami Li Tahrir al-Iraq), though was again unsuccessful because of the fractional struggles over the power of the leadership.[81] These failures eventually led to the creation of the Bureau of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Maktab al-Thawra al-Islamiya fil Iraq), headed by Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim. It is important to highlight the difficulties Iran has had historically in uniting the Shi'a groups of Iraq. Though there have been many reasons for this, most failures have occurred due Iran's efforts to unite these groups under Iranian leadership.

The goal of the Bureau of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq was to set up and provide administrative and logistic support for Iraqi militants, deportees, and refugees residing in Iran.[82] The Bureau was modeled after the Iranian conception of mass politics though the Iranian clerical officials on many occasions kept reprimanding and reminding the Iraqis of the weight they should place in the Iranian Imam. Instead, Iran endorsed the SAIRI faction, which Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim was appointed speaker, and Mahmud al-Hashimi was appointed president. During the early stages of SAIRI development, the

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[80] Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*, 236.

[81] Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*, 236.

[82] Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*, 236.

party was considered more of an Iranian-sponsored bureaucratic structure put into effect to oversee the administrative unification of the fragmented Iraqi Islamist groups.[83] Additionally, the intention was that the SCIRI leadership could form a transitional government if Iran was able to capture areas of southern Iraq, mainly Basra.[84] To resist Iranian pressures on the group, Sayed Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim adopted the term jihad musallah (armed holy struggle) to broaden its support structure among Iraqis. Al-Hakim states:

> It is true that we agree with the Islamic Revolution [in Iran], but we differ from the Islamic revolution in our methods and organization because the circumstances under which the Iraqi people live [are different]. In many areas there are many other differences between Iran and Iraq, especially the nature of the regime in Iraq, which is more repressive compared to that of the Shah.[85]

SCIRI leadership, although founded in and heavily influenced by Iran, understood that people of Iraq ultimately had different political objectives and attempted to change its image.

The Shi'a factions of Iraq which included the Da'wa party and SCIRI, chose to distance themselves from Iran and its influences in hopes of gaining greater popularity among its Iraqi brothers. During Saddam's rule, ISCI fielded an underground militia known as the "Badr Brigades" which was recruited, trained, and armed by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. U.S. officials claim that members of SCIRI were closely tied to Iranian intelligence and received substantial funding during the periods immediately following the U.S. invasion.

On August 29, 2003, Ayatollah Baqir al-Hakim was killed by a massive car bomb with at least 75 others, in his hometown of Najaf, after giving a sermon on the need for Iraqi unity at the Imam Ali Shrine.[86] After his death, Baqir al-Hakim's brother, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, assumed leadership roles of SCIRI. Abdel was responsible for distancing

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[83] Jabar, *The Shīʿite Movement in Iraq*, 239.

[84] Anderson et al., *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?*, 128.

[85] Jabar, *The Shīʿite Movement in Iraq*, 252.

[86] Lawrence Joffe, "Obituary: Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir Al-Hakim," The Guardian, http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/2003/aug/30/guardianobituaries.iraq (accessed April 9, 2012).

himself and SCIRI from its Iranian influence, and on occasion, supported U.S. efforts in Iraq. Also, he was responsible for changing the name of the group from SCIRI, to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) in order to distance the group from its Iranian ties. In 2008, ISCI and its Badr Brigade collaborated with the Maliki government during Operation "Charge of the Knights" against Muqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army. Since that time, ISCI leadership has changed several times leaving the organization significantly weakened. Abdel al-Hakim was diagnosed with lung cancer and died in August 2009, leaving leadership responsibilities to his son, Ammar al-Hakim who now has overall authority of ISCI.[87]

C. BADR BRIGADES

The Badr Brigades were primarily composed of Iraqi deportees and Shi'a prisoners of war during the Iran-Iraq War. These forces made up part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard and were trained, armed, and deployed by Iranian authorities.[88] Although the Badr Brigade was originally intended as an Iraqi organization, it was commanded by an Iranian colonel with the aims of destabilizing the Iraqi regime by a series of bombings.[89] These forces were backed by both Iran and Syria, providing Islamic groups operating inside Iraq with logistics and flexible bases for mobilization and operation. Although SCIRI had been fully absorbed into the Iranian war effort, it also demonstrated the lack of attention given to the political organization inside Iraq.[90] The Badr Brigade fought under the umbrella of the Iranian Islamic revolution rather than attempting to obtain control of the Iraqi government.

During Saddam's rule, SCRI fielded the Badr Army during the war to conduct attacks from Iran into southern Iraq against Iraqi officials. After Saddam's removal of

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[87] Steven Lee Meyers, "Son to Succeed Father as an Iraqi Shiite Party Leader," NY Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/01/world/middleeast/01iraq.html?_r=1&ref=abdulazizalhakim (accessed April 18, 2012).

[88] Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*, 253.

[89] Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*, 254.

[90] *Al-Muwajaha*, issued by The Islamic Center for Political Research as found in Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 254.

power in 2003, the Badr Army burrowed into the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Iraqi police force. Since 2007, the militia has become integrated into Iraq's political process and security forces.[91]

D.   MUQTADA AL-SADR

Different than most religious Shi'a factions of Iraq, Muqtada al-Sadr claimed legitimacy by reference to his father, Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr. His father was the cousin and student of Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr, one of the original founding members of the Da'wa party. Muqtada was also connected to Baqir al-Sadr in his marriage to his daughter. Muqtada's father, Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, emerged as a marja' after the death of Abu al-Qasem al-Khu'i at the hands of the Ba'athist regime in 1992. As the marja', Sadiq al-Sadr established himself as a charismatic figure, particularly in his attempts of restoring the practice of Friday prayer in Iraqi Shi'a mosques.[92] Similar to Ayatollah Khomeini and Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr, Mohammed Sadiq preached the establishment of an Islamic state ruled by the learned jurist (Wilayat al-Faqih). However, Sadiq did not see a fully Islamic state possible in realistic terms because of Iraq's multiple ethnic and religious groups. When al-Sadr proclaimed his leadership over the Iraqi Shi'a, Iran saw it as counter productive to their ideological revolution and took steps to distance themselves from the leader by choosing to close al-Sadr's offices in Iran and expelling his representatives.[93] As the Shi'a revival in Iraq increased and became more demanding, Saddam's regime took measures to prevent it. Fearing another Shi'a religious uprising similar to 1991, the Ba'athist regime assassinated Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr and his two sons in 1999, leaving Muqtada al-Sadr as the only remaining living son of the marja'.[94]

Violence quickly erupted in the Shi'a community after learning of the assassination of Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, later to be known as the al-Sadr intifada. The

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[91] Katzman, *Iran-Iraq Relations*, 1.

[92] Laurence Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf* (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2008), 260.

[93] Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle For Iraq*, 103.

[94] Louër, Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf, 260.

intifada was played out in a series of violence outbreaks throughout southern Iraq against Saddam's regime with little success. The most serious of attempts came on March 17, 1999, when a groups of armed men attacked Baathist government buildings. Jassem, one of the few Shi'a resistance fighters to survive that attack, stated the uprising was coordinated among several different groups to include 168 students from the faculty of Engineering in the University of Basra, the Iraqi Hezbollah, and the Badr Corps.[95] The Iraqi rebels waited for the Iranian run Badr Corps to initiate the attack because of their superior manpower, equipment, and experience. However, Badr support never arrived to assist in the attack that day. It was realized later that at the last moment Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, the leader of SCIRI who controlled the Badr organization, postponed the attack without reason.[96] This did not stop the other portions of the rebels from carrying out the attack that night with heavy casualties and little success. The Iranians, who had operational control over the Badr troops, most likely forbid the crossing from Iran to Iraq because they saw the uprising as doomed from the beginning. Furthermore, the failure of the attack can be used to show the different ideological rifts between the various Shi'a groups and their inability to join together as a united and consolidated effort. These rifts became more evident after the U.S. invasion of Iraq when Shi'a leaders gained greater political power. After suffering catastrophic deaths at the hands of the Saddam regime, the al-Sadr movement had no choice but to remain underground. Only after the U.S. invasion of Iraq was the al-Sadr movement revived under the direction and command of Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's only living son, Muqtada al-Sadr.

After Saddam Hussein's death, Muqtada became very critical of the political apathy of the marja'iyya during the Ba'athist rule by accusing them of allowing his father to be assassinated without interference. Muqtada also attacked Abu al-Qasem al-Khu'i and Ali al-Sistani by referring to them as the "silent marja'iyya" for coexisting with the Ba'athist regime.[97] Muqtada saw Ali al-Sistani, who was an Iranian born cleric that never relinquished his Iranian nationality, as an outsider who was illegitimate to exercise any

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[95] Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle For Iraq*, 107.

[96] Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle For Iraq*, 108.

[97] Louër, Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf, 260.

kind of religious or political authority over the Shi'a of Iraq.[98] This challenge of Iranian heritage allowed Muqtada to gain popularity among the middle to lower class Shi'as of Iraq who demanded change, but not one marked with Iranian influence.

As Muqtada's movement (Jimmat al-Sadr al-Thani) gained more momentum he was able to change the name of Saddam City to Sadr City, brining the deprived neighborhood of at least 2 million people, mainly Shi'a, under his power base.[99] Another measure Muqtada used to increase his dominance was eliminating his opposition. One opponent, Abdul Majid al-Khoei, son of the late Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, became a threat after he was brought into Iraq by U.S. forces in an attempt to bring southern Shi'a cities under some form of pro-U.S. control.[100] Just one day after Saddam's fall on April 9, 2003, al-Khoei was murdered by unknown assailants at the Imam Ali Mosque in Najif, Iraq. It was alleged that this was not a random act of violence, but rather a systematic murder given approval by no one other than Muqtada al-Sadr himself. Though there is has never been any factual evidence of Muqtada's involvement, the al-Khoei's murder proved to be a sensitive moment in the battle for political and religious influence over the Shi'a majority, and was the first indicator of the dangers confronting coalition forces in the post-Saddam Iraq.[101] The ripple effects caused by the murder of al-Khoei also translated to a threat to Ayatollah Said al-Hakim who was another opponent of al-Sadr and also, the nephew of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, leader of SCIRI. Inter-Shi'a fighting can also been seen as an effort of the various militant groups to consolidate power and prevent opposition from forming.

E.   JAYSH AL-MAHDI (JAM)

Muqtada often accused his enemies as being puppets of the Iranian government. Though he opposed Shi'a groups with strong ties to Iran, he was not absent of his own dealings with Iraq's neighbor. In June of 2003, after his first hajj to Mecca, Muqtada

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[98] Louër, *Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf*, 260.

[99] Anderson et al., *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?*, 134.

[100] Anderson et al., *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?*, 134.

[101] Tony Karon, "What a Shiite Stabbing Says About Post Saddam Perils," Time Magazine, http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,442342,00.html (accessed March 22, 2012).

traveled to Iran supposedly to consult with Kahdim al-Ha'eri, the nominal leader of the Sadrist movement. It was during this visit between the two that Muqtada and al-Ha'eri first developed a proposal for creation of an armed militia, later to be known as Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) army.[102] The JAM became prominent in April 2004 when it fought against coalition forces in East Baghdad and in Najaf.[103] From 2006 to 2007, the JAM was also entangled in a fierce territorial struggle with al-Qaeda and its Sunni affiliates over control of Baghdad.[104] In 2007, Muqtada ordered his militia to stand down against U.S. and coalition forces. First, he declared a cease-fire at the beginning of the Baghdad Security Plan, Operation Fardh al-Qanoon, in February, and later in August after violence erupted in Karbala during the Shabaniyah festival.[105] These two cease fire attempts initiated by Muqtada immediately lead to a decrease in the level of violence against coalition troops. It is also important to note that the Iraqi government enlisted the help of Iranian IRGC-QF commander, Brigadier General Qasim Suleimani, to mediate peace talks between Muqtada and the Iraqi government. In the aftermath of defeat, Muqtada organized a new movement called the "Mumahidun," or "Trail blazers," which the majority consisted of social and cultural work to enhance Shi'a living in Iraq. Additionally Muqtada reinvented his Mahdi Army to actively combat coalition, but not Iraqi forces.[106] Members of the JAM that did not agree with Muqtada's decision to a cease-fire left the group to create other militias. These splinter organizations, known as Special Groups, used this as an opportunity to continue violence against coalition forces though under different leadership.

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[102] Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle For Iraq*, 134.

[103] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 3.

[104] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 3.

[105] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 3.

[106] Katzman, *Iran-Iraq Relations*, 4.

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IV. IRAQI SPECIAL GROUPS

"Special Groups are Shi'a militia cells that receive funding, training, and weapons from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), the Iranian Special Forces that export the Islamic Revolution to other countries."[107] The Iranian government has used these special groups in the past to carry out attacks against Iran's enemies as well as increase its regional influence among its neighbors. Iran's ability to provide advanced weaponry, financial support, and training ensured that these groups could not operate independently or without Iranian backing. This dependency created by Iran towards the Shi'a special groups has allowed Iran to influence even day-to-day operations in Iraq. Iranian support for Shi'a militant groups in Iraq started to surge in late 2006 as a result of the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict in Lebanon. Many of the weapons that were successful in Lebanon were also found in Iraq. Caches seized by coalition troops have included many 107mm artillery rockets munitions that show Iranian Defense Industries Organization (IDIO) lot numbers and production dates between 2005 and 2007.[108] After 2007, Shi'a militant attacks against coalition troops began to slow due to inter-Shi'a rivalry and were even further damaged after the series of Iraqi Security offensives in 2008.

Though the offensive against special groups in 2008 had tactical success, it also had some unintended consequences. Increased pressure by U.S. and coalition forces made these Shi'a militant groups more desperate, and therefore more accepting of outside assistance by Iran. Shi'a militia groups have often accepted this support conditionally allowing Iran greater control over their militia operations. The U.S. State Department report on terrorism from April 2009 identifies the threat by these groups and its Iranian influence:

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[107] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 3.

[108] "Shia Strength: Iraqi Militants Adapt to US Drawdown," IHS Jane's: Defense & Security Intelligence and Analysis, http://testwww.janes.com/articles/Janes-Intelligence-Review-2011/Shia-strength--Iraqi-militants-adapt-to-the-US-drawdown.html (accessed May 16, 2012).

Despite its pledge to support the stabilization of Iraq, Iranian authorities continued to provide lethal support, including weapons, training, funding, and guidance, to Iraqi militant groups that targeted Coalition and Iraqi forces and killed innocent Iraqi civilians. Iran's Qods Force continued to provide Iraqi militants with Iranian-produced advanced rockets, sniper rifles, automatic weapons, and mortars that have killed Iraqi and coalition Forces as well as civilians. Tehran was responsible for some of the lethality of anti-coalition attacks by providing militants with the capability to assemble improvised explosive devices (IEDs) with explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) that were specially designed to defeat armored vehicles. The Qods Force, in concert with Lebanese Hizballah, provided training both inside and outside of Iraqi for Iraqi militants in the construction and use of sophisticated IED technology and other advanced weaponry.[109]

Though these special groups operated under different leadership, they all had the objective of targeting U.S. forces operating inside Iraq. Some of these groups have been known also to actively seek to undermine the current Maliki run Iraqi government.[110] Many analysts believe that combined offensive waged by coalition and Iraqi Security Forces against these Shi'a special groups forced much of its leadership across the border into Iran, which have led to fewer attacks against security forces. Many U.S. officials believe these groups currently seeking refuge in Iran will eventually return to Iraq after receiving additional training and support and attack coalition forces with better success. Their return could once again create instability within Iraq and compromise the newly established legitimacy of the Iraqi government. As recently as 2011, there has been an increase of attacks against security forces by these special groups. This increase can be seen as a renewed effort by the Shi'a militant groups to influence the early withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq permanently. The decision of the U.S. government to remove the majority of forces from Iraqi in January 2012 has since decreased the level of violent attacks by these special groups suggesting it is primarily motivated by its anti-U.S. outlook and not its religiously similar ideologies of Iran.

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[109] "Country Reports On Terrorism 2008," U.S. Department of State, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2008/122436.htm (accessed April 9, 2012).

[110] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 4.

A.   KETA'IB HEZBOLLAH (KH)

Keta'ib Hezbollah, or KH, emerged in 2008 after the splintering from Muqtada's Mahdi Army. The primary objective of the group is to force the withdrawal of the U.S. from Iraq through military means as well as the establishment an Iranian style Shi'a theocracy.[111] Out of the Special Group operating in Iraq, KH receives the most influence from Iran and considered to be directly supported by the IRGC-QF.

The leadership and membership of KH is largely unknown. However, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis is a senior adviser to KH and believed to also advise the IRGC-QF. Muhandis is credited with training Shi'a militant groups such as KH and JAM, as well as organizing weapon transfers and supply distribution from Iran to Iraq.[112] Furthermore, Muhandis has been accused of sending KH recruits to Iran to receive special training in special areas such as bomb making or marksmanship. Muhandis, an advisor to Qasem Soleimani, the commander of IRGC-QF, has also been implicated in his participation of the bombing of Western embassies in Kuwait as part of an attempted assassination of the Emir of Kuwait in the early 1980s.[113] KH is known to use intricate weaponry against U.S forces and is similar to that seen by the IRGC-QF and Lebanese Hezbollah. KH's sophistication and advanced methods can be illustrated when in December of 2009, the group successfully hacked into a U.S. Predator drone video feed, which was then reportedly used by the KH to monitor and evade U.S. military operations.[114]

Another weapon commonly found in Iraq among KH militants, the explosively formed penetrator (EFP), is considered one of the most deadly weapons used against coalition troops and can be linked to similar weaponry used by Hezbollah forces in Lebanon. Key metal components found in the EFP require sophisticated machinery that is

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[111] "Kataib Hizbullah (KH)," IHS Jane's: Defense & Security Intelligence and Analysis, http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-World-Insurgency-and-Terrorism/Kataib-Hizbullah-KH-Iraq.html (accessed May 16, 2012).

[112] *International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research*, Kata'ib Hezbollah, March 5, 2010, 3.

[113] "Treasury Designates Individual, Entity Posing Threat to Stability in Iraq," U.S. Department of Treasury, http://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg195.aspx (accessed March 23, 2012).

[114] Michael Hoffman, "Army: Working to Encrypt UAV Video Feeds," Army Times, http://www.armytimes.com/news/2009/12/army_uav_hack_122009w/ (accessed March 23, 2012).

believed not to exist in Iraq.[115] Many analysts believe the materials and technical expertise used in EFPs can only be found in one place in the region, Iran. For these reasons on June 24, 2009, Deputy Secretary of State James B. Steinberg designated KH as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) for their numerous attacks against Iraqi, U.S., and other targets in Iraq since 2009.[116] KH has vowed to continue attacks against coalition troops in an effort to force them from Iraq. They have also indicated that they would widen the scope of their violence to include that of the Iraqi government if there headway made on the security agreement to extend the U.S.' involvement in Iraq.

B.   ASA'IB AL-HAQ (LEAGUE OF THE RIGHTEOUS)

Asa'ib al-Haq (AAH) began operations as early as July 2006. AAH leadership has professed allegiance to Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr.[117] Unlike the KH, Asa'ib Haq (AAH) has fewer capabilities and less direct relations with the Qods Force and is only funded by Qods Force middlemen.[118] Yussef Hashim, a prominent member of the Lebanese Hezbollah, and Ali Mussa Daqduq, were responsible for the formation of the AAH. Beginning in 2006, the Iranian government began to utilize the Lebanese Hezbollah to assert their influence in Iraq. Later the Qods force appointed Qais Khazali leader of AAH. Khazali was also a former al-Sadr movement supporter who studied under Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada's father. Muqtada, however, expelled Khazali from the JAM in 2004 for suspected insubordination during the battle of Najaf against U.S. forces. Khazali was responsible for overseeing all Iranian efforts in Iraqi militia groups.

Qais Khazali, and his brother Laith, and Ali Musa Daqduq, were later captured on March 20, 2007 in Southern Iraq, by coalition troops. During their capture, a great deal of

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[115] Michael Gordon, "Deadliest Bomb in Iraq Made by Iran, U.S. Says," http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/10/world/middleeast/10weapons.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1 (accessed March 22, 2012).

[116] "Designation of Kata'ib Hizballah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization," U.S. Department of State, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/july/125582.htm (accessed March 22, 2012).

[117] Marisa Cochrane, "Asaib Ahl al-Haq and the Khazali Special Groups Network: Backgrounder #38," *Institute for the study of War* (January 13, 2008): 4.

[118] "Shia Strength: Iraqi Militants Adapt to US Drawdown," IHS Jane's: Defense & Security Intelligence and Analysis, http://testwww.janes.com/articles/Janes-Intelligence-Review-2011/Shia-strength--Iraqi-militants-adapt-to-the-US-drawdown.html (accessed May 16, 2012).

intelligence was collected with regards to the level of Iranian influence in Iraqi Shi'a militia groups. From the individuals and the documents they carried, coalition forces found that, "Both Ali Musa Daqduq and Qayis Khazali stated that senior leadership within the Quds force knew of and supported planning for the eventual Karbala attack that killed five coalition soldier."[119] AAH later kidnapped a British IT consultant with his four British bodyguards at the Ministry of Finance in May 2007. As part of a reconciliation deal, Khazali was released in December 2009, only a few days after the IT consultant was released. In December 2011, Daqduq became the last remaining prisoner in American custody to be turned over to the Iraqi government, which was seen by many as a highly controversial decision.[120] The Obama administration stated that Maliki's government declined to allow the U.S. to take Daqduq out of Iraq to be tried on charges of war crimes. AAH, which emerged from JAM, have also been suspected of receiving training from both Lebanese Hezbollah and IRGC forces inside Iran. The Qods Force and Hezbollah trained in groups of 20 to 60 so that they can function as a unit when training was complete and they returned back to Iraq. After completion of training, these units would act independently to fight against coalition forces inside Iraq. AAH, in 2009 accepted a cease-fire agreement, and have recently entered into negotiations with the Iraqi government. In February of 2012, AAH handed over the body of the last remaining U.S. soldier missing in Iraq. AAH sources indicated that the group was not behind the killing but rather just mediators in the process of returning the remains over to the Iraqi government.[121]

C.   PROMISED DAY BRIGADE (PDB)

The Promised Day Brigade (PDB) was one of two groups formed by Muqtada after his ceasefire against coalition Forces in 2007. At that time, Muqtada began to

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[119] Jim Garamone, "Iran Arming, Training, Directing Terror Groups in Iraq, U.S. Official Says," www.army.mil, http://www.army.mil/article/3890/iran-arming-training-directing-terror-groups-in-iraq-us-official-says/ (accessed April 30, 2012).

[120] Charles Savage, "U.S. Transfers Last Prisoner in Iraq to Iraqi Custody," NY Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/17/world/middleeast/us-transfers-last-prisoner-to-iraqi-government.html?_r=1&ref=statusofforcesagreement (accessed April 9, 2012).

[121] Peter Graff et al., "Iraq Militia Hands Over Last Missing U.S. Soldier's Remains," Reuters, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/27/us-iraq-soldier-idUSTRE81Q11N20120227 (accessed March 22, 2012).

remove himself and his followers from violence by instead working to achieve objectives through peaceful means. He disbanded the JAM in 2008, and chose to keep only a small unit of followers for personal security known as Muqaqumum. The Muqaqumum evolved into the PDB, which today receives measured funding and support from Iran. The PDB is composed of former members of the JAM. It is also likely that some members are former members of AAH wishing to continue fighting after AAH accepted a ceasefire with the Iraqi government in the summer of 2009.[122] Though AAH, as well as the JAM, accepted measured support from Iran, they still operate fairly independently. Muqtada, on many occasions, has fallen back on the nationalist nature of the Sadrist movement given the anti-Iranian sentiment of the Shi'a population at large.[123] Muqtada's acceptance of Iranian support is highly dependent on the Iraqi people's opinion of the perceived level of Iran's meddling in Iraqi affairs. Iranian support for Muqtada, which at one time was substantially high, has fallen and can be contributed to the growing anti-Iranian popular opinion among Iraqis.

Though the PDB was created as a personal security force for Muqtada, it has evolved into something much larger. In April of 2009, coalition forces killed one Iranian backed terrorist and captured six others during a raid that targeted a financier who supported both the Mahdi Army Special Groups and the PDB.[124] This raid suggests that elements of the special group and the PDB are both working together against coalition forces. The rift between the various special groups is not as strong as its resolve to remove its perceived U.S. occupation from Iraq. Of the information available on Iraqi Shi'a militant groups, there is little said about the level to which the special groups interact and work together. Though they may have different motivations among these groups, they may be seen as supporting each other under similar circumstances.

Some instances show other special groups working with the PDB; there are also indications of disloyalty within the PDB itself. After Muqtada announced his alliance

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[122] Michal Harari, "Status Update: Shi'a Militias in Iraq," *Institute for the study of War* (August 16, 2010): 4.

[123] Harari, "Status Update: Shi'a Militias in Iraq," 5.

[124] Bill Roggio, "US Breaks up Mahdi Army 'promised Day Brigade' in Al Kut," The Long War Journal, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/04/us_breaks_up_mahdi_a.php#ixzz1py8mIsfg (accessed April 18, 2012).

with Maliki and the creation of the Iraqi National Alliance in 2010, the PDB released a statement that they would abandon Muqtada if he insists on joining the Maliki government. This suggests that members of the PDB may not necessarily agree with Muqtada's peaceful ascension into Iraqi politics. Muqtada decision to participate in Iraqi politics show a growing inclination by him, as well as many of the other Shi'a militant leaders, to resolve their disputes through peaceful means.

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V. IRAN'S SUPPORT FOR SHI'A MILITANT GROUPS IN IRAQ

A. SCOPE AND GOALS

Revolutionary Islam and Persian nationalism have become the major factors that have shaped Iranian foreign policy today. Since the Republics' establishment in 1979, its leaders have used foreign policy to further the States' Islamic agenda. This is evident in its support for foreign radical Shi'a groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas as well as other revolutionary groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Iran has pursued its revolutionary Islamic agenda by denouncing any regional government with pro-Western tendencies by directly challenging their legitimacy.[125]

Persian Nationalism has played an important role in the Iranian foreign policy decision process. Iran has traditionally seen itself as being culturally superior to other states in the region. However, Persian nationalism has also become a reaction to the over-extension of Iran's commitments with political Islam. Nationalism in Iran has become defined as an "Iran first" movement that rejects unlimited and costly commitment in areas of marginal or indirect importance.[126] However, Iran's identification with Persian nationalism has allowed policy leaders to maintain a path different than other countries in the region. Today, the Islamic Republic is perhaps best described as a highly nationalistic country, seeing itself as a symbolic beacon for global Islamic enlightenment, but whose more immediate goal is to drive for regional dominance.[127] Regional dominance has highlighted the potential benefits from supporting the various Shi'a militant groups in Iraq. Iran also portrays the U.S. as a primary obstacle in their ability to spread its ideological and national influence. This chapter will explore the Iranian-U.S. antagonism that may play an important element in Iran's support for Iraqi Shi'a militant groups. Is Iran and Iraqi Shi'a groups' antagonism against the U.S. its unifying element?

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[125] Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 8.

[126] Byman et al., *Iran's Security Policy in the Post-Revolutionary Era*, 9.

[127] Frederic Wehrey et al., *Dangerous but Not Omnipotent: Exploring the Reach and Limitations of Iranian Power in the Middle East* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Publishing, 2009), 12.

B.   U.S.-IRANIAN ANTAGONISM

The U.S. antagonism has persisted since the establishment of the Islamic Republic and can be seen as early as November 1979, when a group of Iranian students decided to organize a sit-in at the U.S. Embassy. The sit-in was a reaction to the recently deposed Shah's medical sanctuary in the U.S. The arrival of the Shah in the U.S. triggered fear among many Iranians that the Shah's illness and a developing conviction that U.S. officials were planning another coup such that had taken place in 1953.[128] Once U.S. Embassy officials realized the magnitude of the event they began to shred sensitive documents on Iranian relations. Khomeini's foreign minister Ibrahim Yazdi approached the Ayatollah on the growing situation within the US embassy, believing it was the residual effects of the revolution, and should be neutralize immediately. Khomeini's answer, to the surprise of the foreign minister, was rather to do nothing. Khomeini approved of the occupation, declaring the embassy to be a "nest of spies."[129] Documents that that embassy staff had been unable to shred were recovered by the students and later published in a series of articles showing some members of the revolutionary leadership had been in contact with the embassy staff. The hostage situation defined Khomeini's revolutionary ideals by highlighting the antagonistic relationship with the U.S. However, it also provided a pivotal moment in U.S. self-perception, as it served as a reminder to U.S. policy makers decision making towards Iran ever since.[130] The U.S. embassy hostage situation is just one of many situations that have sabotaged any inclination of a positive relationship between the two countries.

Another event that has historically shaped U.S-Iranian relations is the U.S.' involvement in the Iran-Iraq war. Saddam Hussein's rise of power in Iraq in 1979 brought tensions between the neighboring countries. Saddam saw the Iranian revolution as an opportunity of weakness that could be exploited to Iraq's advantage. Iraq had been forced to concede to the Iranian Shah's demands over the sovereignty of the Shatt al-Arab waterway that marked the border between the two countries. Saddam perceived it as

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[128] Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and After* (London; New York: Longman, 2003), 226.

[129] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 227.

[130] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 228.

a unique opportunity to reclaim the waterway and acquire new territorial gains. Using the embassy siege as a political scapegoat, Saddam violated the terms of the Algiers Accord and launched an invasion into Iran. Few Iranian officials believed that Iraq could successfully launch an invasion without international support.[131] When Iraq did finally attack, Iranian public opinion believed that the invasion was really a front for an American attack against Iran.

Despite the international arms embargo on both sides, Iraq enjoyed a steady stream of assistance from both the regional Arab states and the West in an attempt to prevent the spread of Iran's Islamic fundamentalism. The failure of the UN to condemn the Iraqi invasion was seen by the Iranians as a breach of international law. Furthermore, the West denied knowledge of the use of Iraqi chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers. Iraq also extended the war into the Persian Gulf by attacking Iranian tankers in an effort to destroy the economic foundation of the country.[132] Iran retaliated by attacking merchant vessels not only of Iraq decent, but also other gulf state flagged vessels. Under these pretexts, Western navies, in particular the U.S. Navy, entered the Persian Gulf to protect shipping, but in effect launched a second front against Iran.[133] The U.S. direct involvement in the Persian Gulf resulted in a further straining of U.S-Iranian relations. On May 17, 1987, an Iraqi Mirage fighter jet accidentally fired missiles into the USS Stark killing 35 sailors onboard.[134] President Regan then responded to the incident by placing the blame on the "barbarian Iranians."[135]

With the lack of progress on the Iraqi front, Iran sought to extend reach and retaliated by pursuing a deliberate policy of destabilization in those Arab countries who had supported Iraq by attacking U.S. interests abroad, much focused on Lebanon. Throughout the 1980–90s Hezbollah often employed the ideology of armed jihad within Lebanon. This included a variety of techniques including martyrdom operations, guerrilla

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[131] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 228.

[132] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 237.

[133] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 237.

[134] U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Formal Investigation of USS Stark's Attack*, Washington D.C., September 3, 1987.

[135] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 228.

warfare, hostage taking, and forceful seizure of power all with the aim of ridding Lebanon of its foreign presence.[136] Hezbollah first used martyrdom operations to destroy an Israeli military headquarters in Tyre in the fall of 1982 killing 90 Israeli solders. Other operations included the U.S. embassy in Beirut in 1983, killing 80 people, and the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks, which killed 241. In response to these operations, much of the public opinion in the Middle East supported Hezbollah's Martyrdom because they perceived the U.S. as aiding Israeli efforts for occupation.[137] Hezbollah's mission against West occupation was seen as justified when U.S. and French troops withdrew from Lebanon in 1984.

During the 1980s Hezbollah spread its ideologies through acts of violence. Groups linked to Hezbollah kidnapped dozens of westerns and held them hostage for long periods of time.[138] The most known case of kidnapping was the TWA flight 847 hijack, which took place in 1985. The kidnapping was masterminded by the infamous Imad Mughniyah of Hezbollah's external security force in response to the Israeli imprisonment of 766 Lebanese prisoners who had participated in the resistance. During the two-week ordeal many passengers were abused and badly beaten. Most known was that of U.S. Navy diver, Robert Dean Stethem, who was tortured, murdered, and thrown onto the airport tarmac. Another well-known instance of kidnapping of U.S Marine Lt. Colonel William R. Higgins by Hezbollah, who was tortured and murdered while conducting a United Nations peacekeeping mission in south Lebanon.

The hostage situation in Lebanon led to secret agreements between the Regan administration and Tehran mediated by Israel. Iran needed weapons and the U.S. wanted the hostage situation to be resolved in Lebanon. However, Iran leaked the deal to the media that humiliated the U.S. in what became known as the "Contra Affair." The resulting embarrassment marked the last time the U.S. made serious approaches towards

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[136] Ahmad Nizar Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah (Modern Intellectual and Political History in the Middle East)* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 81.

[137] Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, 81.

[138] Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History (Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics)*, 1st Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 41.

the Islamic Republic.[139] After the incident, the U.S. abandoned covert assistance to Iraq by providing real time satellite images of Iranian troop movement and supplying combat doctors to the front line. The U.S. also altered its rules of engagement in Persian Gulf operations by actively seeking out Iranian warships. One result of the U.S.' provocative policies against Iran was the USS Vincennes' accidental shooting down of an Iranian airbus en route from Shiraz to the Emirates killing nearly 300 innocent people. Unlike the USS Stark event, the U.S. did not make a specific apology to the Iranian government but instead criticized them on their decision to allow civilian flights into a war zone.[140] Other events, such as the U.S. decision to destroy Iranian oil fields, and the Iranian mining of the Straits of Hormuz that resulted in damage to the USS Samuel B. Robert, also continue to strain relations between the U.S. and Iran.

Today, the relationship between Tehran and Washington is still very volatile. The 1979 U.S. embassy hostage situation still weighs heavily on the minds of both countries. The U.S. believes that the takeover was a breach of international law while Iran feels that it was necessary to avoid a U.S. sponsored coup to bring back the Shah. Furthermore, many Iranians believe Washington authorized Saddam Hussein's invasion into Iran in 1980 as retribution for the overthrow of the Shah.[141] The U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 also increased Iranian fear over U.S. regional domination. Iran's inclusion into the "axis of evil" has indicated hostile U.S. intentions and led many to believe it was a precursor to the invasion of Iran in an attempt to dismantle the Islamic Republic.[142] The Iran leadership attribute the U.S. enmity towards Iran in three factors: first, the Islamic character of Iran's system; second, Iran's insistence on independence (as opposed to the Shah's pro-Western stance); and third, they energy resources in the region, which the U.S. seeks to control.[143] All of these contentions, no matter the validity, have prevented positive U.S. and Iranian relations.

[139] Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, 238.

[140] Farhang Rajaee, *The Iran-Iraq War: the Politics of Aggression* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993), 143.

[141] Charlotte Lynch et al., Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads: An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Publishing, 2010), 9.

[142] Lynch, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 10.

[143] Lynch, *Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads*, 10.

C. IRAN'S INFLUENCE IN THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

The U.S. occupation of Iraq and subsequent removal of Saddam Hussein left a power vacuum for Iran to fill. Iran has attempted to assert its regional influence through a number of political, economic, religious, and military opportunities in Iraq. "Iran has played a critical role in backing given candidates and parties, as well as brokering post-election political agreements to form the majority government in every one of Iraq's elections since 2003."[144] One way that Iran has attempted to increase its influence is by supporting various Shi'a political parties in the newly formed government. By doing so in an effort to gain influence in Iraq, Iran has instead effectively undermined Shi'a unity within Iraq. Understanding its folly, Iran has since attempted to unite the various Shi'a political groups in Iraq by playing a vital role in the establishment of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), which included the majority of the Iraqi Shi'a political factions time, namely ISCI and Da'wa. The UIA was an effort among various groups and influences to join together to take advantage of the political vacuum created during the post-Saddam era.

On 30 June 2004, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) transitioned political control to the newly formed Iraqi interim government. The president was Ghazi Yawer, a Sunni businessman who had strong ties with Washington. A prominent Shi'a Muslim, Iyad Allawi, leader of the Iraqi National Accord and former Baathist party member was elected as prime minister. Another Shi'a, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, spokesman for the Da'wa party was appointed as vice president. The U.S. appointments of Shi'a dominated political figures for the Iraqi interim government resonated distrust among the Sunni populations. Sunni populations expressed their distain for the newly formed political system by initiating a boycott of the first democratically held elections in January 2005. The results of these elections, which occurred on 30 January 2005, were strategically important to Iran because it would single handedly determine the future of its influence inside Iraq. Iran understood that the outcome, which determined a 275-member National Assembly tasked with writing the new Constitution of Iraqi, could be the start to a long

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[144] Peter Alsis et al., *The Outcome of Invasion: US and Iranian Strategic Competition in Iraq* (Washington, DC.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010), 31.

relationship between the two countries that would place Iraq in the subordinate role. The Iranian established United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), backed by Grand Ayatollah Sistani, won 140 seats. The Kurdistan Alliance won 75 seats, and the Iraqiyya List, led by Iyad Allawi, won 40 seats.[145] The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader, Jalal Talabani, was elected President. Low Sunni turnout resulted in the group securing only minimal positions such as assembly speaker, deputy president and prime minister, and only six other ministerial positions.

The UIA, on 15 December 2005, won 128 of the 275 seats during the first full-term parliament elections.[146] The UIA did not include just the prominent ISCI and Da'wa Shi'a parties, but also the Sadr faction. Da'wa leader Nuri al-Maliki was selected as Prime minister, replacing Ibrahim al-Jaafair. Other ISCI figures took several important posts, and the Sadrists took five ministerial positions.[147] Al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army, who openly opposed joining any political party, had become severely weakened in his battle against coalition forces in 2004. This left al-Sadr no longer in power over the majority of the Shi'a population of Iraq. Other Shi'a groups, such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani and the Hawza, and ISCI, had no problem filling the void. Sistani, as well as ISCI, had cooperated with coalition forces. The cooperation between the Hawza and ISCI had allowed them a majority of the seats during the first parliament elections in December of 2005. Al-Sadr soon realized that for him to reemerge as the leader of the Shi'a movement of Iraq, he could not rely solely on violence. Sistani and al-Sadr's political objectives aligned over the perceived notion of a Shi'a controlled Iraqi government, which permitted al-Sadr to join the UIA.

It was Muqtada's influence that allowed the UIA to transfer prime ministerial powers from Jaafair to Maliki. Maliki, the then Da'wa representative to Damascus, was seen among many as a compromise candidate.[148] Muqtada saw Maliki's entrance into the

[145] "Population Estimates and Voter Turnout For Iraq's 18 Provinces," ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, http://aceproject.org/ero-en/topics/electoral-participation/turnout/updatedelectionresults.pdf (accessed May 16, 2012).

[146] Katzman, *Iran-Iraq Relations*, 1.

[147] Katzman, *Iran-Iraq Relations*, 1.

[148] Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada Al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle For Iraq*, 188.

political scene as an opportune moment for al-Sadr to gain Maliki's support for his movement. However, later Maliki would find himself in a strategic struggle between Muqtada and the U.S. Muqtada's views against U.S. occupation created conflict between Maliki in his role as Prime Minister of Iraq. Eventually this antagonism would create rifts between Maliki and Muqtada on the trajectory of Iraqi politics. In 2007, Muqtada removed himself and his party from Iraqi politics by giving up his five ministerial positions from the Iraqi cabinet and more importantly, the alliance with the UIA. The Sadrist faction removing itself from the UIA is only one indication of subsiding influence of Iran in Iraqi politics. In 2008, Maliki's Da'wa party separated from ISCI and the UIA to for a new party called "State of Law Coalition." This breakup among Shi'a political parties inevitably hurt Iran's chances at a unified Shi'a government sympathetic to their regional influence.

In January 2009, the Iraqi provincial elections changed the political landscape with ISCI suffering from low poll numbers. Maliki's newly formed State of Law slate was able to secure 28 out of the 57 total seats, giving itself effective control of the Baghdad Provincial Council by displacing ISCI.[149] ISCI's poor performance during the provincial elections came as a shock to many observers. Some people believe that ISCI's results were not only a product of its attempts of decentralizing the government among provinces, but also their perceived close ties to Iran. Iran and its influence in ISCI began to be seen by many Iraqi's as an attempt to exercise undue influence on Iraqi politics.[150] The 2009 provincial election also indicated a weakening support among the Iraqi people for Iranian interference, whether perceived or factual in nature. In its wake, there is a growing support for Iraqi nationalist movements such as the increased votes for secular parties, such as that of former Prime Minster Iyad al-Allawi. Furthermore, many U.S. officials saw the elections as a unique opportunity for Muqtada al-Sadr to endorse a Shi'a party and denounce violence, much like December of 2005 where he was integrated into UIA. However, al-Sadr chose to only support other Sadrists on the lists, composed

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[149] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iraq: Politics, Elections, and Benchmarks*, by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report (Washington D.C.: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing 7-5700/RS21968, August 24, 2010), 5.

[150] Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Elections, and Benchmarks*, 6.

predominately of the "Independent Liberals Trend," that did not fair well in the elections. Many people believe that this failure reflects voter disillusionment with al-Sadr's continued decision to field militias, which many blame as a primary source of violence in Iraq.[151] Though the 2009 provincial elections proved successful for Maliki, there were many other parties such as al-Allawi that were able to gain greater political power. The results would force Maliki to allow the incorporation of non-Shi'a parties in order to retain his monopoly of power within the Iraqi government.

Maliki got his chance to consolidate his power during the 7 March 2010, "Council of Representatives (COR)" elections. The COR was to determine the next four year national government. Maliki was seen as a clear winner of the elections allowing him to co-op his some of his political competitors in some provinces, many of which were Sunni Arabs and Sunni tribalists. However, none of these Sunni officials ranked very high in Maliki's State of Law Coalition. A number of bombings over several government buildings in Baghdad in late 2009 and early 2010 had undermined Maliki's control over the government. As a result of the perceived weakness of the Maliki government, many opposition Shi'a factions chose to unite under an "Iraqi National Alliance (INA)". This opposition party included ISCI, Sadrists, and other prominent Shi'a political figures and was seen as an effort to gain the widest level of support. Maliki had to compete with both the INA, and the Iraqi National Movement, "Iraqiyya" led by former Prime Minister Lyad al-Allawi, and former Baathist leader Saleh al-Mutlaq, who appealed to the Sunni population.

The result of the elections put Iraqiyya over Maliki's State of Law slate. Maliki demanded a recount of the votes but the results where no different. In accordance with the Constitution, the newly formed COR convened but was not able to form a new government due to a variety of internal disputes. In May 2010, Maliki attempted to expand his own influence by accepting an alliance with the rival Shi'a INA. However, Sadr and ISCI were not able to agree on Maliki remaining the prime minister, which

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[151] Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Elections, and Benchmarks*, 7.

invariably ended the alliance. During the inter-governmental disputes over the formation of the government persisted, Maliki was able to exert his authority in the role of acting prime minister.

In October of 2010, Maliki received the backing of the majority of the forty COR deputies supporting al-Sadr, which brought Maliki within reach of another term as prime minister.[152] This new alignment, once again uniting the fractured Shi'a parties, allowed affairs within the Iraqi government to continue. However, at the same time these alliances within the Shi'a political groups further isolated the Sunni party Iraqiyya from participation. In December 2010, Maliki presented the cabinet of the COR, that allowed Maliki to remain as prime minister as well as minister of Defense, Interior, and State. Iraqiyya was given deputy prime mister and president, and nine other ministerial posts. The INA faction received 13 ministries, eight of which were given to the Sadr faction.

Al-Sadr's acceptance of various political positions in the Iraqi government has changed his tone towards Iraqi affairs. By incorporating himself into the process, Muqtada could no longer criticize governmental decisions. Though he supported the Maliki government, Muqtada strongly supported an immediate U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq by suggesting removal by the initial December 2011 deadline as agreed upon the Iraqi Parliament Status of Forces agreement (SOFA) and the U.S. in November 2008. President Bush and the Maliki government agreement on the 2008 SOFA indicated a timetable allowing for renegotiation in 2011 that would invariably extend U.S. troop involvement in a training and support capacity. During that time, Maliki was able to use his influence over the U.S. to his advantage while he was in a power struggle with other Shi'a factions such as Muqtada. However, as the Maliki government became more powerful, there was less need for the security by U.S. forces. The decline of this relationship between Maliki and the U.S. led to the renegotiation of the 2008 SOFA. In September 2011, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta proposed a plan that would keep 3,000

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[152] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, by Kenneth Katzman, CRS Report (Washington D.C.: Office of Congressional Information and Publishing 7-5700/RS21968, April 19, 2012), 14.

to 4,000 US troops in Iraq after the 2011 deadline, only to train Iraqi security forces.[153] The Iraqi government approved the extension of U.S. troops, but only under the stipulation that they can no longer be immune from local laws.

The struggle between various political factions within the Iraqi government has exacerbated the need for factions to ally with other ideologically similar parties. In many cases this unity has made the affairs within the government easier to accomplish. However, by doing so this unity has also isolated other ethnic minority groups, such as the Sunni's, who wish for inclusion into the process. The alliance formed by Maliki's "State of Law" and Muqtada in October of 2010, which resulted in a Shi'a led Iraqi government, aligned nicely with Iran's strategic objectives in the region. Iran asserted itself by playing a direct role in the commission that excluded Sunni and secular candidates from the ballot, and has supported both that Badr Brigades and Sadr factions.[154] However, public opinion polls indicate the vast majority of Iraqi's feel that although Iran has successfully influenced the current Iraqi government, they continue to reject its inference. Anthony Cordesman's, *Iraq and the United States: Creating a Strategic Partnership*, best captured this viewpoint by stating:

> Iran is not popular but has ties to ISCI, continues to have ties to elements in the Sadr and splinter militias, and has influence in a number of areas. Most Iraqis, including most Shi'ites polled, do not support or trust it. This mistrust has been compounded by Iran's support of a mix of rival Shi'ite militias, occasional support of Sunni insurgent elements in the past, and current support for splinter groups in the Sadrist movement. So far, Iran's deals with Iraq have given some leverage over the government, but have produced little gratitude.[155]

These words unambiguously show the Iraqi distrust for Iranian political intervention. Though public opinion polls in Iraq suggest that the large majority of the Shi'a population distrusts Iranian interference, it is the Sunni population that most fears it. This

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[153] Michael Kamber, "Status of Forces Agreement," NY Times, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/iraq/status-of-forces-agreement/index.html (accessed April 9, 2012).

[154] Anthony H. Cordesman et al., *Iraq and the United States: Creating a Strategic Partnership* (Washington, DC.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010), 122.

[155] Cordesman et al., *Iraq and the United States: Creating a Strategic Partnership*, 117.

fear was compounded in January 2010, when the Justice and Accountability Commission (JAC), successor of the "De-Baathification Commission," invalidated 499 individuals from political representation.[156] The JAC was headed up by Ali al-Lami, a Shi'a, who had been in U.S. military custody during 2005–2006 for alleged assistance to Iranian agents active in Iraq.[157] Maliki, in December 2011, increased the Shi'a-Sunni divide when he accused Vice President, al-Hashemi, of running Sunni hit squads that targeted government officials. Al-Hashemi, a prominent member of the Iraqiyya political party that was in direct competition with Maliki during the 2010 provincial elections, was forced to flee north to the Kurdish region of Iraq. Maliki's decision to accuse al-Hashemi of crimes has increased Shi'a-Sunni sectarian tensions within the Iraqi government. Sectarian rifts inside the Iraqi government have contributed to its overall ineffectiveness. Future weakness within the Iraqi government may allow it to become more susceptible to external influence, namely Iran.

Though Maliki has confronted many obstacles in his rise to power, he has successfully consolidated his power within the Iraqi political system. Maliki's achievements could not be possible without his unique ability of balancing competing interests and influences. As a member of Da'wa party, Maliki fled to Iran in 1979 to conduct military raids against Saddam and his regime from across the border. Iranian influence for Da'wa decreased after the establishment of SCIRI giving Maliki and his party more freedom to pursue its Iraqi agendas. Though Maliki has distanced himself from Iran, he has been known to visit his counterparts in Tehran to discuss regional affairs. On occasion Maliki has also used Iran to influence Iraqi politics. In 2010, Iran was instrumental in convincing al-Sadr to join Maliki's "State of Law" party ensuring long-term Shi'a domination in Iraqi politics. Maliki's delicate balance was also noticed in his support for U.S. actions in Iraq used to prevent other influences from allocating too much power. It was Maliki's decision to initiate the 2008 Iraqi led operation known as "Charge of the Knights" to dismantle Muqtada's JAM dominated regions of Basra. By

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[156] Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, 9.

[157] Katzman, *Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights*, 9.

eliminating Sadr, Maliki was no longer threatened by emergence of any Shi'a political opposition. At the same time Maliki's decision aligned with U.S. objectives of restoring stability and security to Iraq.

Maliki's delicate balance of power can also be seen in his welcoming of the Iranian supported AAH into Iraq's political system. Many observers believe that this notion of bringing Iranian backed Shi'a militant organizations into the government will inevitably bring Iraq closer to the Iranian sphere of influence. Though this may be in some measure true, there is greater insight by Maliki into this controversial decision to bring AAH into the political process. Despite U.S. and coalition forces withdrawal in January 2012 there continues to be a wave of attacks on both Shi'a and Sunni religious groups that have undermined Maliki's security efforts in Iraq. Without having the ability of the Maliki government to provide social services such as security, people will have no choice but to place their support behind armed militant groups such as AAH. Maliki has attempted to undermine the authority of these special groups by integrating them into the Iraq government.

Maliki has attempted to regain control over Iraqi security by initiating deals with both Shi'a and Sunni militant groups. In addition to the integration of such militant groups as AAH into the political system, some observers believe that Maliki may use AAH and their credentials to divide challengers in his own coalition and weaken al-Sadr's political power.[158] Qais Khazali, head of AAH in Iraq, was a former al-Sadr movement supporter that studied under Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, Muqtada's father. Muqtada however expelled Khazali from the JAM in 2004 for suspected insubordination during the battle of Najaf against U.S. forces. By bringing AAH closer into Iraqi politics, Maliki is able build a stronger and more unified Shi'a coalition. Khazali's historically contentious relationship with al-Sadr reinforces Maliki's decision to integrate AAH without fear of al-Sadr loyalty.

Iraqi Shi'a Militant groups have operated in the past in a unified effort to expel foreign occupation by the U.S. and other coalition forces by armed conflict. Maliki

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[158] Jack Healy et al., "Political Role For Militants Worsens Fault Lines in Iraq," NY Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/06/world/middleeast/iraqi-moves-to-embrace-militia-opens-new-fault-lines.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all (accessed April 18, 2012).

successfully utilized U.S. and coalition security forces in a way to maximize his power. After Maliki saw the U.S. as no longer strategically important to him, he shifted alliances allowing the prevention of renewal of the 2008 SOFA, liberating them from a U.S. dominated influence. The withdrawal in January 2012 has provided the conditions for many of these militant groups to throw down their weapons and join Iraqi society in a peaceful way. Although many people see Maliki's integration of militant groups into society as beneficial, others believe that such groups do not have the inclination to operate in any other capacity than violence.

VI.   CONCLUSION: ARE THE SHI'A OF IRAQ IRAN'S PROXY?

During a student symposium titled "The Youth and Islamic Awareness," Al Arabiya News reported that Brigadier General of IRGC-QF, Qasem Soleimani, said that the Islamic Republic controls "in one way or another" Iraq and South Lebanon and that Tehran is capable of influencing the advent of Islamist governments in order to fight "arrogant" powers.[159] As previously discussed, this thesis has argued that many U.S. policy makers believe that Iran has supported armed Shi'a militias throughout the last decade in Iraq. By doing so, Iran has successfully broadened its foreign policy options including pressuring U.S. and coalition forces out of Iraq, militarily make it impossible for the U.S. to claim victory, and enabling pro-Iranian militant groups in the region to engage Iranian enemies on its behalf if necessary.[160] General Soleimani, the unofficial Iranian spokesman on Iraqi affairs, has been instrumental in the creation of these client militant groups that are able to carry out Iran's proxy war against its enemies. Having direct control over AAH and KH militant groups, Soleimani has dramatically increased Iran's level of influence inside Iraq.

From the evidence collected during this thesis, it is difficult to deny Iran's overbearing influence in almost every aspect of Iraqi affairs. Of all the different facets of Iranian influence, none are as important as its involvement in the creation of various Iraqi Shi'a militias. Why has Iran been successful in influencing the Shi'a militant groups of Iraq? This thesis has argued that there are many connections between Iran and Iraq. It is evident that, historically, Iran has played an important geostrategic role in Iraq. Many of the Shi'a communities share religious shrines in both countries and also share many cultural and linguistic connections with each other. Despite these ties, the Shi'a of Iraq have remained ideologically independent from Iran by successfully blending its Arab

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159 Saud Zahid, "Chief of Iran's Quds Force Claims Iraq, South Lebanon under His Control," Al Arabiya News, http://english.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/01/20/189447.html (accessed April 16, 2012).

160 Katzman, *Iran-Iraq Relations*, 2.

identity with that of its shared Shi'a religion. It is this unique ideological split that has allowed Iraqi Shi'as to separate themselves from the majority Sunni ruled Arab world and that of the religiously dominated Shi'a of Iran.

The Shi'a of Iraq's ideological differences from both Sunni's of the Arab world and that of Iran have historically labeled them as outsiders in their own country. During the twentieth century, Sunni dominated Iraqi regimes exaggerated the Iraq-Iran Shi'a relationship to marginalize the Shi'a population, ensuring they never received integration into the Iraqi government. The Shi'a population, despite being mostly banned from political participation, continued to identify themselves primarily as Iraqis and only second as Shi'as. The Shi'a population's blend of Iraqi nationalism is used to explain how and why Iraq could sustain an eight-year war with an army composed of 80 percent of the Shi'a faith against a Shi'a nation led by an ayatollah of noble descent from the Shi'a Imams.[161]

The Iraq-Iran war is only one example of the Iraqi Shi'a support for Iraq over its perceived Iranian influence. While the vast majority of Iraqi Shi'a supported Iraqi ambitions, some religious groups connected with their Shi'a ideology and used it as a political alternative to the repressive nature of the Sunni dominated secular regimes. Many people of the Shi'a faith joined prominent religious groups such as al-Da'wa and later, SCIRI. The Sunni dominated Iraqi government saw the formation of these religious groups as a threat to the state and took swift action to eliminate them. Despite the regimes attempts, groups such as Da'wa survived only by escaping to Iran where they became heavily influenced by their hosts. Other groups such as SCIRI, though an Iraqi organization, were formed in Iran and lead by Iranians to fight against the Iraqi Baathist regime. These groups were able to flourish in Iran based on their similar goals of removing the Iraqi regime. One example, the Badr brigade operated as an armed wing from inside Iran, in hopes of destabilizing the Iraqi regime.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq and the subsequent removal of Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime presented the Da'wa party and SCIRI with an opportunity to reemerge from its underground Islamic activism and participate in Iraqi politics. Da'wa, as a result,

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[161] Jabar, *The Shī'īte Movement in Iraq*, 254.

has reorganized itself in an effort to portray itself as a genuinely independent Iraqi nationalist movement. The future of Da'wa in the post-Saddam era of Iraqi politics, however, has been plague with competition from other Shi'a Islamic groups such as SCIRI and the Sadrists. Recently, the Da'wa party has gained the strongest support among Iraqis as seen by Nuri al-Maliki, a prominent Da'wa member's election to the position of Iraqi Prime Minister.

The political vacuum left after Saddam's removal invariably lead to a power struggle among the Iraqi Shi'a community. The prior establishment of Shi'a religious groups in Iraq, such as Da'wa and SCIRI, created an environment that prevented a unified Shi'a political voice. Iran sought to maximize its influence in Iraqi politics by supporting various Shi'a factions inside Iraq by appealing to their similar religious ideologies. In an effort to unite the various Shi'a political groups in Iraq, Iran attempted to play a vital role in the establishment of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), which included the majority of the Iraqi Shi'a political factions at that time, namely ISCI and Da'wa. The results of the elections, which determined a 275-member National Assembly tasked with writing the new Constitution of Iraqi, was the first success of Iran towards hegemony in Iraq. The elections on 30 January 2005, proved the Iranian strategy effective, with UIA receiving the majority of seats in the assembly, allowing Iranian influence into the writing of the first post-Saddam era Iraqi constitution.

At the same time in 2005, at the height of their influence in Iraq, Iran also provided measured support to various Shi'a militant groups in an attempt to counter the U.S.' expanding footprint within in the region. Is Iran's support for Iraqi Shi'a groups based on their shared Shi'a religion or is there more to this motivation? Marisa Cochrane, an expert in Shi'a militia activity from the Institute for the Study of War, defines such special groups as "Shi'a militia cells that receive funding, training, and weapons from Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps-Qods Force (IRGC-QF), the Iranian Special Forces that export the Islamic Revolution to other countries."[162] The key to understanding the relationship between Iran and the Iraqi Shi'a special groups, according to Cochrane, is the SP's willingness to export Iran's Islamic revolution inside Iraq. This

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[162] Cochrane, "Iraq Report: Special Groups Regenerate," 3.

thesis, however, argues there are more than just similar religious affiliations that motivate such this relationship. Iran has used these special groups, not in a religious capacity, but in an ideological struggle against the background of a shared U.S. antagonism. By influencing such groups, Iran has created intricate proxies, able to carry out attacks against Iran's enemies. In an effort to do so, Iran hopes to increase its regional influence among its Middle Eastern neighbors, namely Iraq.

The U.S. and coalition forces saw early on the increase in activity by Shi'a militant groups and their ties to Iran as destabilizing and counterproductive to their objectives in Iraq. Increased pressure by U.S. and coalition forces inevitably made these Shi'a militant groups more accepting of outside assistance from Iran. Shi'a militia groups accept aid in return for allowing Iran greater control over their operations inside Iraq. Many analysts believe that the combined offensives waged by coalition and Iraqi Security Forces against the Shi'a special groups forced much of the leadership across the border into Iran. Though these special groups operate under different leadership they all have one common objective: to pressure U.S forces into leaving Iraq by inflicting heavy causalities. There may be similar religious ideologies among the Iranian government and the Shi'a special groups of Iraq, though it is their shared antagonism against the U.S. that drives the consistent relationship.

Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has sought to extend its regional influence by pursuing a deliberate policy of destabilization in Arab countries who have supported US interests abroad, most in Lebanon. Throughout the 1980–90s Hezbollah often employed the ideology of armed jihad within Lebanon. This included a variety of techniques including martyrdom operations, guerrilla warfare, hostage taking, and forceful seizure of power all with the aim of ridding Lebanon of its foreign presence.[163] The same Lebanon scenario can be applied to Iraq as Brigadier General Qasem Soleimani so elegantly points out during the January 2012 Islamic Youth Student symposium held in Tehran. This thesis has shown evidence that the Iranian government has supported Hezbollah style influence in Iraq and would like nothing more for a mirrored scenario as that in Lebanon. AAH and KH militant groups are both suspected of receiving training

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[163] Hamzeh, *In the Path of Hizbullah*, 81.

from Lebanese Hezbollah inside Iran. Though Hezbollah, another Shi'a militant group seems to indicate similar religious motivations to that of Iran, Iran has also been known to provide measured support for that are ideologically different, if not opposite.

One of the most ideologically different groups Iran has been accused of supporting is the Sunni Taliban in Afghanistan. Despite these differences, Iran has been accused of providing the Taliban with measured support. The U.S. Department 2009 State Country Report on Terrorism, identifies this level of Iranian support by stating:

> Iran's Qods Force provided training to the Taliban in Afghanistan on small unit tactics, small arms, explosives, and indirect fire. Since at least 2006, Iran has arranged arms shipments to select Taliban members, including small arms and associated ammunition, rocket propelled grenades, mortar rounds, 107mm rockets, and plastic explosives.[164]

Alireza Nader's, "Iran's Balancing Act in Afghanistan," argues the Taliban, though anti-Shi'a and anti-Iranian in nature, have benefited from the U.S.-Iranian rivalry.[165] Similarly, Iran benefits from the relationship by allowing the Taliban to continue to keep U.S. forces occupied in Afghanistan and therefore deterring and countering the potential for a U.S. attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Iran's mixed foreign policy decisions on Afghanistan, as Nader describes as a "hedging strategy," shows on one hand, their support the overthrow of the Taliban for greater regional security and on the other, would implement policies to undermine U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. Iranian support for anti-U.S. terrorist groups, in the Middle East region and beyond, has been an effort to achieve its overarching Iranian foreign policies. These policies have allowed these pro-Iranian proxies to be called upon by the Iranian regime if it perceived itself being threated on a number of its strategic interest in the region, most importantly being the countries infant nuclear weapons program. The common theme that ties Shi'a special groups in Iraq, Taliban in Afghanistan, and other Iranian supported terrorist organizations in the region is their shared antagonism against the U.S. and its allies.

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[164] "Country Reports On Terrorism 2009," U.S. Department of State, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2009/122436.htm (accessed April 9, 2012), 192.

[165] Nader et al., "Iran's Balancing Act in Afghanistan," 6.

What is the level of support Iran provides to the Shi'a militant groups of Iraq? This thesis has explained that Iran has actively engaged in support for such groups since the invasion of 2003. During this period, Iran's heavy support for Shi'a militant groups increased its overall influence in Iraq. This influence can be directly translated to the success of the Iranian sponsored United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) in 2005 at the height of Shi'a militant group activity. Since that time, however, the Iraqi Shi'a communities inability to remain united has had decreased Iran's overall influence in Iraq. This fragmentation, in part due to the inability of Shi'a political groups such as Da'wa and ISCI to unite under a single party affiliation, has created rifts in the Shi'a led Iraqi government. Similarly, fault lines in the JAM and Sadr factions created groups such as AAH, KH, and the Promised Day Brigades. All of these groups have different leadership and objectives, dividing the Iraqi Shi'a community in its political pursuits. Despite these differences, Iran has attempted to support multiple Shi'a militant groups in Iraq by provided advanced weaponry, financial support, and training to ensure that none operate independently or without Iranian backing. The dependency of these special groups on the support by Iran has in Iraq started to surge in late 2006 and may be linked to the movement of arms from Lebanon after the Hezbollah-Israeli conflict. In 2008, ISCI and its Badr Brigade collaborated with the Maliki government during Operation "Charge of the Knights" against Muqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army dramatically decreasing the level of activity by Shi'a special groups.

The Shi'a special groups activity has remained active throughout the post-Saddam era and can be directly linked to the level of U.S. forces in Iraq and their actions. Violence conducted by these groups against U.S. and ISI forces has been witnessed even as late as January 2011. Increases during this time can be seen as a direct response to the Iraqi governments attempts to renegotiate the SOFA for U.S. forces to remain in Iraq. U.S. and Iraqi differences that arose during the SOFA renegotiation, leading to a non-renewal of the SOFA, indicates the level of influence these groups may have over the Iraqi government. The U.S. withdrawal of forces in January 2012 has also led to a decrease violent activity conducted by the special groups. Iran today enjoys a smaller influence among Shi'a militant groups of Iraq. Without a shared interest in Iraq through

the lens of a U.S-Iranian enmity, Iran's need for Shi'a special groups in Iraq could see an end altogether. The end of such a relationship can also explain why the some special groups, such as the AAH, have decided against continuing to pursue violent means by instead throwing down their weapons and accepting integration into the Iraqi government.

There is a growing mistrust among all Iraqi's, Sunni and Shi'a, of the influence of Iran in its affairs. At a time, after the collapse of Saddam's regime, it could be argued that the need for Iranian support was wanted and needed by the Shi'a of Iraq. Today, however, the decision of the Iraqi government to force U.S. and coalition forces out of the country, could be seen not only as a move away from U.S., but also Iranian regional influences. U.S. troops withdrawal in early 2012 has left the Iraqi Shi'a militant groups and Iran without a shared common enemy. Without this shared enemy the relationship between Iran and Iraq will become less strategically important. Iran in the future will no doubt continue to pursue a policy of influence among Iraqi affairs. Despite these attempts, Iraq will continue on a trajectory towards its own nationalistic objectives, free from both U.S. and Iranian interference.

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